

JIBBY JONES

AND THE ALLIGATOR

ELLIS PARKER BUTLER



JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

By Ellis Parker Butler

A NEW story of boy life on the Mississippi by the author of "Swatty" and "Jibby Jones." George, who in his inimitable manner told the story of "Jibby Jones," is again the narrator, and Jibby himself, that unsurpassable boy leader, is the hero. The gang still lives in Riverbank, and the boys play in and about the Mississippi. This is Ellis Parker Butler absolutely at his best. It is even more original and more amusing than its predecessor, "Jibby Jones," of which the *Worcester Gazette* said: "Jibby is Some Boy! He's kin to Peck's Bad Boy, Aldrich's Tom Bailey, Huck Finn, Tom Sawyer, — even Kim and all the Boy Immortals (except Little Lord Fauntleroy)."

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

ELLIS PARKER BUTLER



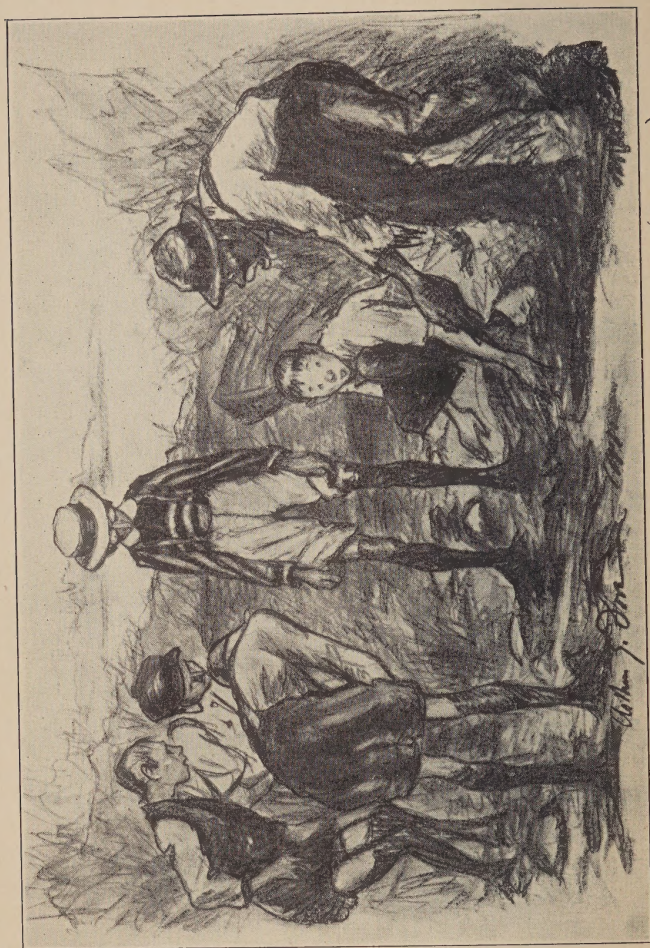
REFERENCE LIBRARY * HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO. * BOSTON, MASS.

*Archive
Collection*



* *
This book may not leave the Offices
and if borrowed must be returned within 7 days

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR



THAT 'GATOR HAS BEEN HERE NOT TWO HOURS SINCE (*page 241*)

JIBBY JONES

AND THE ALLIGATOR

*The Story of the Young Alligator-Hunters
of the Upper Mississippi Valley*

BY

ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

With Illustrations by
ARTHUR G. DOVE



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge

1924

COPYRIGHT, 1922 AND 1923, BY THE SPRAGUE PUBLISHING CO.

COPYRIGHT, 1924, BY ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Riverside Press

CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

TO
WALTER P. McGUIRE
WHO HAS BEEN BETTER THAN AN UNCLE TO
JIBBY JONES

CONTENTS

I. EXTRA HOT WEATHER	I
II. "VALLEY FORGE"	10
III. THE DISCOVERY	18
IV. WAS IT AN ALLIGATOR?	27
V. THE ALLIGATOR CLUB	38
VI. THE SCOOTER CUP	47
VII. BOAT-BUILDING	57
VIII. THE NEPTUNE	65
IX. MORE ALLIGATORS	73
X. THE LEFT HAND	86
XI. ON TO VICTORY	95
XII. THE BAND	104
XIII. THE STUFFED ALLIGATOR	113
XIV. THE JUNK WAGON	126
XV. SEVERAL THINGS	138
XVI. CHUNGA-CHUNGA	149
XVII. MUSIC IN THE AIR	157
XVIII. THE BAND REVOLUTION	165
XIX. THE COFFEE-GRINDER	176
XX. LIVER-COFFEE	186
XXI. THE BAND CONTEST	199

CONTENTS

XXII. ZORA MAY	207
XXIII. THE GHOST	220
XXIV. ORPHEUS SETS A TRAP	233
XXV. WE FIND TRACKS	240
XXVI. WE GET THE ALLIGATOR	247

ILLUSTRATIONS

"THAT 'GATOR HAS BEEN HERE NOT TWO HOURS
SINCE" *Frontispiece*

THEN HE GRABBED HIS RIGHT HAND WITH HIS LEFT
HAND AND YANKED IT AROUND TOWARD HIS LEFT
SIDE 80

THE WHOLE BUSINESS TOPPLED OVER 178

"GO AND GET ME A TWO-BY-FOUR SLAB, THREE FEET
AND EIGHT INCHES LONG, NOTCHED ONE FOOT FROM
THE END, AND WITH FOUR HOLES BORED IN IT" 228

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR



CHAPTER I EXTRA HOT WEATHER

IN one way some of the credit for starting the Alligator Hunters' Club belongs to me, because I was the first person to see the alligator, but maybe Jibby Jones deserves more because he was the one who thought of spending that Fourth of July the way we spent it. If we had not gone to the sandbar, some one else would have seen the alligator first.

Of course, we don't have alligators in our part of the Mississippi River as a usual thing—we never have them. We are too far north. The alligators belong away down South, and no one had ever seen one as far north as Riverbank, or anywhere near as far north—not by a thousand miles, I guess; but that was why seeing this one made me a sort of hero for a while and got my name in the papers and everything.

The way it happened was like this. It came along to the Fourth of July, and I don't know whether to call it the coldest hot fourth of July I ever knew, or the

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

hottest cold Fourth of July. If you figured it by the H. J. Smoots thermometer, it was the coldest; but if you figured it by your feelings it was the hottest; it all depended whether you looked at it one way or the other. Anyway, it was different from any Fourth of July I ever spent. Or you, either, I guess.

This is how it happened. Along toward the last of June, school ended, and we all went up to Birch Island, the island in the middle of the good old Mississippi, where our folks all have cottages built on stilts. It was hot already. Before school closed, the teachers had to have all the windows wide open, and it had been getting hotter ever since. On the first of July it was so hot, we thought it could never get any hotter.

That day we went fishing. We took Wampus Smale's motor-boat and went up the river, but the river was too high for fishing, so we went into one of the sloughs, and in there it was so hot we almost panted for breath. It was too hot to fish. We loafed. We would take off our clothes and jump in and have a swim, and then climb out and sit awhile and then jump in and have another swim. That was the only way to keep cool.

Along about dusk we went back to Birch Island, and it was not much cooler. We tied up the motor-boat and climbed up the bank and Wampus walked a couple of yards toward his cottage. He had his fishpole over his shoulder, and he tried to throw it up on the porch from where he was, as if it was a lance or a spear, and he did it, but the butt end of

EXTRA HOT WEATHER

the pole went spang into the thermometer that was hanging beside the door, and that knocked the thermometer down and it clattered on the floor of the porch.

Well, we all went up to look at the thermometer, to see how badly it was broken, and it was broken badly enough to suit anybody. The tube that holds the juice that runs up and down to tell how hot or cold the weather is was broken in two places and some of the blue juice in the tube was spilled. The thermometer was ruined. Instead of registering ninety in the shade, or something like that, it registered colder than freezing. It registered eighteen above zero.

The thermometer was one of those big ones, over two feet tall, with "H. J. Smoots, Jeweler and Clock-maker, Riverbank, Iowa," printed on it. So, when Wampus saw it was no good any more, he took it in his hand to sling it into the river, but Jibby Jones grabbed it.

"I wouldn't do that," he said. "I wouldn't throw it away."

"Why not?" Wampus wanted to know. "It is no good."

"Well, it is not as good as it was," Jibby agreed in that slow way he has when he is sure he is right, "but it is half as good."

"No, it isn't!" Wampus said. "It's no good at all. It won't tell the temperature any more. That tube's broken. Anybody can see that. It's not worth shucks as a thermometer now. How is it worth anything?"

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

Jibby Jones stood there with the thermometer in his hands, looking at it as solemn as an owl.

"My father had a watch once," he said.

Then we knew something was coming. Whenever he talked like that we knew he was going to mention something like the pyramids or Alaska or the alligators on the Everglades and prove we were wrong, so Tad and Skippy and I just grinned.

"Well, what if he did have?" Wampus asked.

"It broke," Jibby said. "My father was up North, seeing how the Mackenzie River looks where it empties into the Arctic Ocean, so he could put it in the book he is writing about rivers, and he took out his watch to look at it, but his hands were cold and he dropped it and the sledge ran over it. It was a good watch and that might not have hurt it, but when it fell it lit on a chunk of ice and broke open like an egg. So when the sledge ran over it the watch was ruined."

"I should think so!" said Skippy Root.

"Yes, indeed!" said Jibby Jones. "When a watch breaks open like an egg and a sledge runs over it, it is never much good as a time-keeper afterwards. But my father did not throw it away. He gathered it up piece by piece—here a wheel and there a wheel, and the mainspring here and the case there. And that was lucky, because the eskimos thought those watch wheels were the most beautiful jewelry they had ever seen. My father traded the smallest watch wheel for three silver fox skins, eight seal skins, seven slabs of dried caribou meat, and five hundred pounds of

EXTRA HOT WEATHER

seal meat. And that was for the smallest watch wheel. He got more for the others. And one Eskimo gave father two dogs and a house and three walrus tusks and twelve assorted skins for the mainspring."

"I wish you could trade that busted thermometer for an iceberg," Skippy said.

"Maybe I can," said Jibby Jones. "If I can find any one that would rather have a broken thermometer than an iceberg I can do it, if he has the iceberg and I have the thermometer. But that was not all my father did with the watch. He sent the empty case to the factory that made the watch and told them it had been a good watch and had been to the mouth of the Mackenzie River, and they sent him a new watch for it."

Then I began to see what he was getting at.

"And this thermometer was only half a thermometer," Jibby Jones went on. "It was half thermometer and half advertisement for H. J. Smoots, Jeweler and Clockmaker, Riverbank, Iowa. The thermometer is not much good now, but the advertisement half is just as good as ever. If I throw it all away, it will be gone, and that will be the end of it, but if I take it over to my cottage and hang it up, it will still be a good advertisement for H. J. Smoots—almost as good as it ever was."

"No, it won't be," said Wampus. "Who wants to be advertised by a busted thermometer?"

"Well, I thought of that, too," Jibby Jones said. "If we throw the thermometer into the river, it will be gone and forgotten, but if I hang it up and Mr.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

H. J. Smoots comes up here, he will see it, and he will say, 'My, my! I must send those folks a new thermometer!' And then we will have a new one."

Well, we got to talking about what sort of man H. J. Smoots was, and whether he would think what Jibby Jones said he would think, and we all sat down on Wampus Smale's steps and looked at the river and sweated and talked, and we got switched to talking about the North Pole and cold places, and about how Mr. Stefansson, the Arctic explorer, says you can keep warm enough at the North Pole if you know how, but you can't keep cool at the Equator, whether you know how or not; and Tad said that hot weather like this made him wish he was at Valley Forge or some other cold place.

Valley Forge is the place where George Washington's army had to spend one winter and nearly froze and starved to death.

"Well, I don't think they had it so hard," Wampus Smale said. "War wasn't so bad then as it is now; it was more like a picnic, I guess."

Jibby Jones did not say anything, but I was sitting sidewise on the bottom step and I could see his nose sort of quiver when Wampus said that, and I guessed what was the matter. You could not say anything against that old Continental Army or George Washington, unless you wanted to hurt Jibby Jones, and there were two reasons why. One was that Jibby Jones had been all over the world with his father and knew about other countries, and he knew the United States is the best of them all and the best there ever

EXTRA HOT WEATHER

has been. And he knew that George Washington and that old ragged Continental Army had the meanest part of the work to do when it came to making us a nation.

And there was another reason why Jibby Jones did not like to hear anything against George Washington or his army, and that was because Jibby Jones's nose was like his Grandfather Parmenter's nose, and his Grandfather Parmenter's nose was an inheritance from Jibby's Great-Great-Grandfather Parmenter, and once George Washington had complimented Jibby's Great-Great-Grandfather Parmenter on his nose. "Captain Parmenter," George Washington had said, "you have the nose of an aristocrat, but you have the heart of a patriot." So I expected Jibby to say something, but he did not. He sat there with the H. J. Smoots thermometer on his knee, and pretty soon we were wondering what we could do to have a good time on the Fourth of July if this hot weather kept on.

We talked of a lot of things we might do—one thing and another—and then Jibby spoke up.

"There's one thing I've always wanted to do on the Fourth of July," he said, "but I've never been where I could do it before. Sometimes I've been in Africa with father on the Fourth of July, and sometimes in Europe, and sometimes in South America, and when we've been in the United States on the Fourth of July I've never been where boys were. Not boys I knew. So I've never been able to do it."

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"What is it, Jib?" I asked him.

"Be Great-Great-Grandfather Parmenter or somebody," he said. "Be a Continental soldier, just as if I was back in Revolutionary times, with the army around me and everything just as it was. That's what I've wanted to do—spend a whole Fourth of July just as if I was one of the men in the Revolutionary Army."

"Great!" Skippy said, almost before Jibby was through saying it. "Bully! A whole day, from sunup to sunset!"

"From sundown to sundown, so we can spend the night in camp, too," Jibby said.

Well, we did not have to say any more. We simply ran away with the idea. We all talked at once, and we said the Mississippi would be the Delaware or the Hudson, and the parts of Iowa and Illinois we could see would be New York or New Jersey or Pennsylvania or Massachusetts, or somewhere where the Revolution was fought, and we said Jibby must be George Washington. We insisted on that. We said it was his right, because he had thought of the idea, and he was tall and a good general and looked like a Revolutionary soldier every way.

"It will be great!" Wampus said. "We'll get the folks to let us go the night before, and we'll all take plenty of food——"

"No, I'll take the food for all of us," Jibby said.

So we said he could take the food and we arranged who should take a flag and who should take a cannon

EXTRA HOT WEATHER

made out of a log, and we thought it all out and settled it, and then it was dinner-time for some of us and supper-time for the rest, and we went home. Jibby Jones took the busted H. J. Smoots thermometer along with him.

CHAPTER II

"VALLEY FORGE"

WELL, it got hotter and hotter! It began to look as if our Revolutionary Army would have to pretend it was fighting the Revolution in the Sahara Desert, or on the Equator in Brazil, it was so hot, but we went right ahead getting ready, and when the afternoon of the third of July came we were all ready. We went down to the edge of the river with all our truck and loaded it into Wampus Smale's motor-boat. The first thing Jibby put in the boat was the H. J. Smoots busted thermometer. Orpheus Cadwallader was there, too. Orpheus Cadwallader is the fat man that lives on Birch Island all the year around and takes care of things.

"Is Orpheus going, too?" I asked Jibby.

"He's only going up with us to bring the boat back," Jibby said.

We were all happy and patriotic and joyful, and we put the log cannon in the bow of the boat and Skippy unfurled the flag and we all crowded in and started. Orpheus steered the boat. We went up along Birch Island and out around Oak Island and on up the river. It was hot. There was some breeze, but it was going the way we were and we could not feel it. At first we did not mind the heat much because we were excited over getting started, but when we had

“VALLEY FORGE”

gone two or three miles, crowded in that boat, with the sun pouring down on us and with sun reflected up at us from the river, we began to be baked and stewed and roasted, and I was just going to ask Orpheus how far he was going to take us when Jibby said something. He had been sitting there with that busted thermometer on his lap and now he looked at the river.

“Ice!” he said.

I thought he must be sunstruck. I thought maybe the heat had been too much for him and he was out of his head. He stood up and looked up the hot, almost boiling, river where the heat waves were sort of steaming up ahead of us. He shook his head as if he did not like what he saw.

“Bad!” he said. “I hope we can make it, Orpheus, but I never saw so much floating ice in this river so early. Do you think we can force the boat through?”

Orpheus sort of grinned.

“I guess maybe we can, General Washington,” he said. “We’ll try, anyhow.”

Of course, there was no ice. There was nothing but heat, and the most heat I ever felt in my life. But Jibby Jones shook his head again and looked serious. Then he shook that busted H. J. Smoots thermometer a couple of times and looked at it.

“Three below zero!” he says. “Well, no wonder there is ice. Three below zero and still falling!”

And that was so, too—according to that thermometer. It *said* three below zero. So Jibby reached down in the bottom of the boat and got his coat and

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

put it on and buttoned it and turned up the collar.

"Men," he said, "don't take any chances. Don't let your feet and hands freeze; remember they belong to your country." Then he pointed ahead and told Orpheus to look out and not jam the boat into that big cake of ice ahead of us or we might sink. There was no cake of ice, but Orpheus grinned and swung the boat out and made a big half-circle around the cake that was not there.

"That was a narrer exscape," Orpheus said; "mighty narrer." And he put his knee against the steering-wheel and blew on his hands as if they were half frozen, and grinned.

Well, we all got into the game then. We guessed we were Washington crossing the Delaware or something like that, and we all let on we were freezing cold and shivering and suffering from the low temperature. We put on our coats and blew on our hands and beat our arms against our chests, and the sweat just poured off us. And then Orpheus swung the bow of the motor-boat toward the big sandbar in the middle of the river, about three miles above our island.

"Look out!" Wampus said. "Be careful, Orph, or you'll run us onto that sandbar."

"What sandbar?" Jibby asked, standing up and looking around. "I don't see any sandbar. All I can see is Valley Forge, where this army is going into winter quarters."

So then we knew what he was up to. We knew why he had let on the weather was below zero, and ice in the river, and all. We were the ragged Con-

“VALLEY FORGE”

tinentials going into winter quarters at Valley Forge and that sunbaked and blistered sandbar was Valley Forge! And that was exactly it. Orpheus landed us there, and we took all our stuff out of the boat and he started back down the river.

“And don’t forget your orders, Captain,” Jibby called after him.

“I won’t, General,” Orpheus called back.

Hot? Phew! The sand back from the edge of the water was so hot you could not bear your feet on it. Jibby stood and looked around. He turned the busted thermometer upside down and shook it and then turned it right-side up and pounded it with his hand.

“Twelve below zero!” he said when he had looked at it. “Men, we are in for a winter of suffering and hardship, but it can’t be helped. This thick forest will supply us with logs with which to build cabins.”

Well, there was no forest—not a tree! There was nothing but a few empty clam shells and a little drift-wood. It was the barest, hottest sandbar I ever stood on.

“I ask you to bear the cold and the suffering bravely,” Jibby said, sticking that old thermometer upright in the sand. “What you suffer I, too, will suffer. If you lack clothing, I shall not be more warmly clad. If you go hungry, I also shall fast. Our first task must be to clear away this deep and hampering snow so that we may build our winter cabins.”

And what do you think the snow was? Nothing but all the sand on that sandbar! That was the idea—

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

sand was snow, and heat was cold, and July was February, and the river on either side of the sandbar was two ridges of hills, and everything was just the opposite of what it really was. And that busted H. J. Smoots thermometer proved it. You couldn't go back of a thermometer that *said* it was below zero.

Well, it was pretty good fun for a while. We hunted up pieces of driftwood and shoveled the sand and pretended it was snow, and we put the log cannon on the point of the sandbar and raised our flag, and Jibby was as serious as an owl about it. He marked outlines where we were to build log cabins, and the log cabins were sand heaped up. He marked outlines of the redoubts and forts, and we heaped up sand to be the redoubts and forts. He made us gather all the clam shells for ammunition and stack it up.

It was fun, but it was hot. Where we scraped the top sand away to make the forts and cabins, the lower sand was moist and cool to our feet, and we worked away in lively shape, blowing on our fingers and swinging our arms and saying how cold it was, and every minute getting hotter and hotter and also hungrier and hungrier.

"Say, Jibby——" I said, 'for I had thought of something.

Jibby swung his face around and looked at me down that big nose of his, sort of sad and solemn.

"Colonel," he said to me, "I willingly share your privations, but the discipline of the army must be preserved. You will address me as 'General.'"

"All right, General," I said. "I only happened to

“VALLEY FORGE”

think of something. We ought to complain more. We ought to grumble. At Valley Forge the soldiers had to occupy a cold bleak hill and sleep under frost and snow without clothes or blankets. Hardly any of them had good shoes; their feet froze and bled. Of eleven thousand men, three thousand were unfit for duty.”

“I am aware of that, Colonel,” said Jibby George Washington Jones. “You have been four days without meat. There is not even straw to raise the sick above the wet, cold earth.”

“Well, all right,” I said, for I saw Jibby had read more about Valley Forge than I had, “but I think we ought to grumble and complain. The soldiers did. And then you ought to try to sustain our spirits. George Washington did.”

“I guess you’ll grumble and complain before this cruel winter is over, without pretending to,” Jibby said; and we did.

The weather got colder and colder all afternoon, or so Jibby and that H. J. Smoots thermometer said. It seemed to us it was getting hotter and hotter, but the thermometer went down from twelve below zero, to fourteen below zero, and by sunset it was so cold we had to quit work, and we just lay around and gasped with the heat. Whenever Jibby George Washington Jones wanted colder weather, he turned the thermometer upside down and shook out another drop of the blue juice in the tube, and we could see with our own eyes it was colder. At dusk Jibby said it was time to eat and we all gave a whoop. You bet

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

we were hungry! We made a rush for the grub-cabin—the place where we had piled up a low sand wall to show what was the grub-cabin—and Jibby Jones dug around in the sand and brought out a cracker-box. He opened it and there were just five crackers in it—not big square soda crackers, but little oyster crackers about as big as the end joint of your thumb.

“What’s that?” Wampus asked.

“That’s our evening food,” Jibby said. “There is one apiece for each of us.”

“But—say!—is that all we’re going to have?” Skippy asked. “Do I only get one of those measly little crackers for supper?”

“That’s all,” Jibby said. “This is Valley Forge, and the army is on short rations.”

Well, there was grumbling and complaint enough to suit anybody then. We all kicked. We said it was all right to play Valley Forge to a reasonable limit, and to pretend that ninety-five in the shade was fourteen below zero, and that heat was cold, and that sand was snow, and that a bunch of boys were the Continental Army, but when it came to pretending that one oyster cracker was a meal, it was going just a little too far. It was over-pretending. We said we would be dogged if we would pretend one cracker was a meal.

“You don’t have to pretend,” Jibby Jones said. “It is a meal. It is all the food there is. But if you’re not satisfied with your share, you can have my share to divide among you.”

“VALLEY FORGE”

Well, that was like George Washington, and it was like Jibby Jones, too; but one oyster cracker divided among four boys would not go far. We told Jibby to eat his cracker, but we also told him what we thought of him. We told him we would not stand it—that we would go home.

“Some of the soldiers at Valley Forge said that,” Jibby said. “And some did go home, but some couldn’t go. You’re some that couldn’t.”

And that was so, too. There was not a single way to get off that sandbar.

“But some of the soldiers just made the best of it,” Jibby said, “and stuck it out, and that’s how the war was won. They made the best of it and stuck it out.”

Then he ate his cracker.

We were pretty hungry—we *felt* as hungry as the soldiers at Valley Forge must have felt, but I guess we were not—and even looking at the H. J. Smoots thermometer could not freeze us to death. Jibby got a blanket and went to the other side of the sandbar and rolled himself up and went to sleep, or pretended he was asleep. We took a dip in the river to cool off and sat and sang songs awhile, but the mosquitoes were fierce and we turned in, too. It was almost too hot for sleeping, but we had to wrap our heads in our blankets to keep the mosquitoes away. Wampus and Skippy Root and Tad and I grumbled and rolled about and stewed for I don’t know how long and then we went to sleep.

CHAPTER III

THE DISCOVERY

THAT was a terrible night. We would roll and toss and get too hot and throw off the blankets. Then the mosquitoes would eat us alive and waken us. Then we would roll up in the blankets again. It was just sleep and wake and sleep and wake all night. It might as well have been below zero for all the comfort and rest we got.

When I fell asleep, I would dream I was starving to death at Valley Forge and that I was cold—freezing cold. I would dream I was standing sentry in the snow with no shoes on my feet and no gloves on my hands, and my uniform just a lot of thin rags, and my musket so cold it burned my hands, and then I would wake up and the sweat would be pouring off me and I'd feel that I'd never get cool again as long as I lived. Along toward morning I was so tired and played out I just naturally had to sleep, and I did, but I dreamed I was a sick soldier with no straw between me and the wet earth of Valley Forge, and that I was having a high fever that was getting higher every minute until it got so high it was burning me to a crisp, like a slice of bacon.

That wakened me, and when I wakened I was thinking of fried bacon, and it was the sun shining on me

THE DISCOVERY

that had wakened me. I sat up, and I was hungry, and I was tired, and I was hot.

Maybe you know how it feels to wake up on one of these hot mornings after a night that has been as hot as blazes and see the old sun getting ready to be hotter than ever. It is discouraging. It takes all the pep right out of you. And that's what it did to me. There was only one thing that made me feel better. Out toward the tip of the sandbar Jibby Jones was getting our breakfast ready for us!

While I sat there, yawning and rubbing my eyes and scratching about eight hundred mosquito bites, I saw Jibby Jones standing over a camp-fire he had made with driftwood, and it was the happiest sight I had seen in many a long day. I was mighty near starved, and there was good old Jibby fixing the fire and lifting the lid of a tin kettle to poke at whatever was cooking in it. Did I feel better? Oh, boy!

But there was one thing made me feel sick. When Jibby had put a couple of pieces of wood on the fire and put the lid back on the kettle, he walked over to that H. J. Smoots thermometer and looked at it and then blew on his fingers and beat his arms and stamped his feet! He was still keeping up the nonsense that we were at Valley Forge and suffering with cold. And I had had enough of that—more than enough!

I kicked my blanket aside and jumped up and gave Jibby a good-morning yell, and that wakened Wampus and Skippy and Tad. We all ran over to where Jibby was.

"Oh, boy! Breakfast! Won't it taste good!"

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

Skippy said, and then he peeled off his clothes and we all peeled off and we made a dash for the river and had a good swim and ran on the sand until we were dry. Then we dressed and went back to where Jibby was cooking. He put the lid on the kettle when we came up.

"I don't know how this is going to be," he said. "I've been up over an hour and I put the kettle on as soon as I got up, but it looks as if it was going to take a lot more cooking. It don't seem to get tender."

"What is it?" Wampus asked, and lifted the kettle-lid and looked into the kettle.

We all looked, and the more we looked the less we could make out what it was Jibby was cooking for breakfast. Wampus took a stick and poked into the kettle and lifted the thing up out of the boiling water.

"Why!" he said, surprised-like. "Why, it's a boot!"

It was a boot, too. It wasn't anything else but a boot—an old leather boot, sole and heel and all.

"Look here!" Wampus said, mad enough to bite somebody. "Look here, Jibby, what's the idea? Is this a joke?"

"Joke?" said Jibby. "I don't think it is a joke. You may think it is a joke if you want to, Wampus, but I don't call it much of a joke to have to stay here all day with nothing but an old boiled boot to eat. I call it hardship. I call it no picnic. But if I were you I wouldn't hold that boot out of the kettle. If I were you I'd put it back in and let it be cooking, be-

THE DISCOVERY

cause I have a feeling that boot is going to be tough enough, no matter how long it cooks."

"Look here!" I said. "When did you tell Orpheus to come for us?"

"To come for us?" Jibby repeated, looking innocent. "I didn't tell him when to come; I told him when not to come. I told him not to come before to-morrow morning."

He looked at me and frowned.

"You had better button up your shirt," he said, "or you'll freeze your chest. It's thirty below zero this morning."

Well, what could we do about it? We might have jumped on Jibby and thrown him into the river, but what good would that have done? We complained bitterly and hunted through all the stuff we had brought up in the motor-boat, but there was not a thing to eat—not a crumb! We scattered out and hunted all over that sandbar for turtle eggs, but we did not find one turtle egg. There wasn't a thing to eat but boot! No breakfast, no dinner, no supper—except boiled boot! So we tried to eat boiled boot.

Maybe you never tried to eat boiled boot, or thought much about it. I never had. When the history said the rations were so scarce at Valley Forge that some of the soldiers tried to eat their boots, I did not think much about it. It did not mean anything much to me. None of that old Revolutionary War stuff did. It was just "Somebody signed a Declaration of Independence, and Washington crossed the Delaware, and the war ended at Yorktown." I had never thought

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

much about the war beginning in 1775 and lasting until 1781 and then right along until the enemy got out of New York in 1783—eight long years of it—with battles and grumblings, and suffering and hunger, and cold and sickness, and wounds and deaths. Eight years of it! And here we were kicking about one day of *pretend* war! I began to feel ashamed of myself.

“All right!” I said. “If we’ve got to eat boot, we’ve got to. Let’s eat!”

Jibby flipped the boot out of the kettle on to a tin plate and we let it cool awhile and then we tried to eat it. We cut strips from what looked like the tenderest part, but there wasn’t any tenderest part. Boot is boot, no matter how much you cook it or what part you try to eat. It tastes like leather and it is leather, and it is no use trying to fool yourself. If you boil a slipper for a whole year, it will be tough, and this wasn’t any tender thing like a slipper; it was a boot, and one of the toughest boots I ever saw. And it had not boiled a year, either.

We sat there and chewed and chewed and chewed, and we did not get a bit of nourishment. It was the poorest food I ever tackled. We chewed for half an hour, and then Jibby said we must not overeat, and he put the rest of the boot back into the kettle. We all felt pretty sore at Jibby, and hot and hungry and mad. Especially Wampus Smale.

“What’s the matter?” Jibby asked. “Aren’t you having a good time?”

“No, I’m not!” Wampus told him. “I never knew

THE DISCOVERY

such a miserable Fourth of July. Maybe you think it is funny to have us dumped up here on this boiling sandbar with nothing but an old boot to eat, but I don't."

"Why, I thought you would love it," Jibby said in his serious way. "You said you thought the Revolutionary War was nothing but a picnic, and this isn't one one-thousandth as bad as one single day at the real Valley Forge. I thought you would like to play war. I know what is the matter with you, Wampus!"

"What?" Wampus asked.

"You're hungry," Jibby said. "You haven't had enough to eat. You'd better have another piece of boot."

Well, we all howled then—howled at Wampus—and Jibby went over and looked at the H. J. Smoots thermometer.

"Good news!" he said. "The thermometer is rising; it isn't as cold as it was. It's only ten degrees below zero now. If the weather gets a little milder, we won't suffer so much from the cold."

Even Wampus laughed then. After all, we could live until the next day without eating, if we had to, hungry as we might be. We knew now a little better what the old Continental soldiers had to stand often enough when they were fighting to make this a free nation. I guess we had a better idea what a good country this is, too. Old Jibby George Washington Jones with his boiled boot and his thermometer had made us take notice.

So we scattered out over the sandbar to hunt turtle

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

eggs again. It did seem as if a big hot sandbar like that ought to have turtle eggs on it somewhere, and turtle eggs make mighty good eating—better than boiled boot, anyway. We were scattered around, digging wherever we thought there might be eggs, when all at once Tad let out a whoop.

We straightened up to see what was the matter. Three motor-boats were headed for the sandbar. The first was Wampus's boat with his father and mother and sisters and my folks in it, and the other two had all the rest of our folks, and we could see lunch-baskets and lunch-boxes and coffee-pots and water-melons and cakes done up in napkins, and pies done up in oil paper. Just food and food *and* food!

We all ran for the boats as hard as we could run, except Jibby. Jibby was already there. Mr. Smale was the first to step ashore. He looked around.

"Well, how did the army get along at Valley Forge?" he asked. He grinned when he asked it, too.

But Jibby Jones did not smile. He looked at Mr. Smale through his shell-rimmed spectacles as solemn as an owl.

"Fairly well, sir," Jibby said. "Nobody starved to death, and we have enough boot left to last all winter at the rate we've been eating it."

He stopped to wipe off the perspiration that was running down his face and dripping from that long nose of his, and then he said:

"But my troops did suffer severely from the bitterly cold weather."

By that time it was noon and boiling hot, and my

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

mother and the other ladies were gasping for air and begging us to hurry and get off that sandbar before we all had sunstrokes, and we were willing enough. Jibby and Tad and Skippy and Wampus went to roll up the blankets and get our other things together, and I tipped over the kettle and spilled the water out of it. I took the boiled boot by its strap and threw it at an old log that was stranded on one edge of the sandbar.

I thought, the minute I threw the boot, that it was funny I had not noticed that log before, because it was such a whopper—six or eight feet of it out of the water and more of it in the water. The boot skidded along on the sand and stopped short about a foot this side of the log, and then something happened that made my eyes bulge out and genuine cold chills run up and down my back. The log sort of raised itself up and split open at the end and made a snap at that boot and grabbed it! I saw white teeth and a big red mouth close on that boiled Valley Forge boot, and then the log slid backward off the sandbar into the river and was gone.

For half a minute I couldn't even squawk, I was so scared. I didn't know *what* I had seen—I couldn't believe my eyes. Then, all at once, I sort of remembered all I had ever heard about alligators, and I yelled "Alligator! Alligator!" and Jibby Jones turned and looked at me and then came loping to me and I tried to tell him.

They all crowded around me then, and I said how I had thrown the boot and how the log had come to life and swallowed the boot—or, anyway, grabbed

THE DISCOVERY

it—and backed into the river. At first nobody believed me, and they thought I had had a sunstroke, but, while the others were telling each other to lay me on my back and put water on my head, Jibby Jones walked over to the edge of the sandbar. He got down on his hands and knees and studied the sand. Then he raised his head and called.

“Father,” he called, “come here, please. I think George has indeed seen an alligator.”

CHAPTER IV

WAS IT AN ALLIGATOR?

WELL, nobody there had ever seen an alligator outside of a cage except Jibby and his father—unless I had just seen one; but we all crowded down around where Jibby was, and the big claw-marks were plain enough in the sand. Mr. Jones got down on his hands and knees opposite Jibby and studied those claw-marks and then he began asking me questions. When he got through, he told us what he thought.

“My opinion,” he said, “is that George did not see an alligator. George may have thought he saw an alligator, but he was excited and he was mistaken. And the reason I am sure he did not see an alligator is that no alligators are ever seen so far north. How far away were you, George?”

“Well, I was over there by the kettle,” I said.

“Rather far, you see,” said Mr. Jones. “Now, as a matter of fact, the soft-shell turtles grow to considerable size in this river, don’t they? Wasn’t it, as a matter of fact, George, an extra large soft-shell turtle?”

“Well, I *thought* it was an alligator,” I said.

“No doubt you did, my boy,” Mr. Jones said, “but if you could not have seen an alligator you did not see one. And I think that is the answer, folks. George

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

did see something, because here are the claw-marks, and George probably did see something grab the boiled boot and back into the water with it, because a turtle might do that very thing. What George saw was a turtle. I speak positively," he said, as he got up, "because I have for many years made a special study of rivers, and I know alligators are never found in rivers this far north."

When grown folks talk that way there isn't much a fellow can say, so I didn't say anything at all. I thought maybe Mr. Jones was right, anyway. But Jibby Jones got down flat on his stomach and sniffed at the sand.

"Father," he said, "I don't like to differ with you, but I think George did see an alligator. I think I can smell an alligator odor here."

He pushed that long nose of his against the sand again and sniffed the way a dog sniffs.

"Yes," he said as he raised his head again, "I'm sure I get a whiff of alligator. And you know, father, you often say my nose is like my Grandfather Parmenter's nose, and he had an excellent nose."

Then everybody laughed and made a joke of it, and the women-folks said they would die if we stayed in the sun another minute, so we all got into the boats and went on up the river to the grotto, where it is always cool, and we spent the rest of Fourth of July there.

The next day everybody had forgotten about the alligator but Jibby and me, and I didn't say any more about it for fear the boys would tease me, and I only

WAS IT AN ALLIGATOR?

knew Jibby was thinking of the alligator by the way he kept silent and frowned. He was thinking of that alligator odor, I guess, and trying to remember just how the alligators he had smelled in the South did smell. And late that afternoon this fat old Orpheus Cadwallader who is caretaker of our Birch Island came rowing home from town where he had been to get some bacon, which is what he mostly eats, and he was just full of talk.

You can always tell when Orpheus is full of talk, because it sort of oozes out of him all over. Or maybe it is better to say he is like an old brass bowl most of the time, but when he has a lot of talk in him he is like that same bowl when it is new polished. The talk Orpheus wants to talk just shines from him. And as soon as you see Orpheus shine like that you can say, "Orph has got ahold of something new to talk about." And no mistake, either.

Well, if you knew Orph as well as we do you would know that when he oozes talk-shine that way it means something about the river, or the island. The whole western hemisphere could go to war against the whole eastern hemisphere and Orph wouldn't be as excited about it as if a big tree fell and blocked Bertram's Slough or some fellow caught an eight-pound perch. Because Orph was born and raised on the Mississippi, and when a man is that, and has lived fifty or sixty years right on the edge of the Mississippi, the old river becomes the most important thing in the world. Iowa and Illinois are not great States bounded on one side by the Mississippi, to Orpheus; Iowa and Illi-

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

nois are just two banks of the Mississippi, and that's all the good they are as far as Orph cares. And a rise of two inches in the old river is more important to Orpheus than if a new continent should rise in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

So we five boys were sitting on the riprap rocks talking about anything at all when Orph rowed up in his skiff, and at the first look we saw the talk-shine on his face. He couldn't hardly wait to get his skiff tied and get ashore, he was so eager to tell what he knew.

"Well," was the first thing he said, "I guess you boys won't be able to swim in this river any more this summer."

"Why not?" Wampus asked.

"Alligator," said Orpheus, as proud as if he was the man that invented alligators instead of being only the man that was telling about it. "There's an alligator in the river. A whopping big alligator. Anywhere from six to twelve foot long."

"Aw, quit!" Skippy Root said. "You're trying to fool us, Orph. There never was an alligator this far up the river."

"That's right," Orpheus said. "Never was. But there is now. It's been seen. And a whopper, too. Six to twelve foot long; bite your leg off in a minute. It's working up-river; and don't ask me why. Maybe it's crazy; maybe it's gone wrong in the head and is a lunatic alligator. I don't know. Maybe all the alligators down South are sick and tired of being shot at and killed off and being made into pocket-

WAS IT AN ALLIGATOR?

books and handbags. Don't ask me; I don't know. Maybe they're going to exodus out from the South and emigrate up North here, thinking it's safer. How can I tell? Maybe this is just a scout they sent on ahead to nose things over and see how it looks and then go back and report. How do you expect me to know? Or maybe a whole colony is coming up and only one has been seen so far. Maybe it's a whole crowd, like the Pilgrim Fathers or something, and the river full of them. But you better keep out of the river—six to twelve foot long—bite your leg off in a minute—alligator!"

He was plumb out of breath, being so fat and excited, and he had to stop to breathe. He wiped the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand, and pulled his skiff up on the rocks.

"Who saw it?" Wampus asked.

"Everybody," Orph said. "Lots of people. Quite a few. One or two, anyway. Rufus Higgs saw it. Saw it plain and clear with his own eyes."

"Well," Tad Willing said, "maybe it is a stray alligator that got away from some circus or something, and got into a creek and swum down to the Mississippi. That might be. I don't believe an alligator ever was fool enough to swim all the way up the Mississippi to here. But maybe it got out of a zoo. Maybe it got out of the Chicago zoo and swam down the Drainage Canal to Rock River and down Rock River to the Mississippi. That would bring it somewhere near here."

"I don't know where it come from," Orpheus said,

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

getting a little stubborn, "but I know it's here, and you'd better keep out of the river. It's six to twelve foot long, and it could bite your leg off in a minute. In less than a minute, as far as that goes. Rufus Higgs saw it with his own eyes. And I heard him tell at least thirty, and maybe fifty, folks right down there to town on Parcell's dock."

Well, everybody was just about as excited as Orpheus was, and I was proud and satisfied, because I had been right, and so was Jibby Jones. We all got out our .22 rifles and cleaned them and oiled them and scouted around our part of the old river in Wampus Smale's motor-boat, and up every slough, for Orpheus said the alligator was working upstream, because it had been seen below town first, and then near town, and then a little way above town. In the next week I guess we spotted five hundred and sixty old logs and slabs lying on the riverbanks, that we had never noticed before, and we went up to every one of them and investigated to see if it was the alligator. There couldn't a piece of driftwood float down the river but we were into Wampus's boat or a skiff and out to the middle of the river to see if it was the alligator.

And we boys were not the only excited ones. The whole town was excited. There were articles in the Chicago newspapers and even in the New York newspapers about an alligator having been seen at Riverbank, and every day our own papers had a space headed "Alligator News" and told who had seen the alligator that day, or who had thought he had seen

WAS IT AN ALLIGATOR?

the alligator, and where. You hardly knew what to believe. First some one would say he had seen the alligator below town, and then some one would say he had seen it above town, or back in one of the sloughs, and the reports had that alligator so scattered around, up and down the river, that some folks thought there must be dozens of them. And then, about the middle of July, we heard the truth about the alligator and knew there was one.

The truth came by telegraph from away out in Montana somewhere, from a man named Richard Henderdon who was part owner of the Great United Henderdon Shows. He had just happened to see a piece in the paper about the great Riverbank alligator and he told what had happened. Back in May his circus and menagerie was giving a show at a place up the Rock River on a flat at the river edge when one of his elephants went crazy and got on the rampage. While they were trying to quiet the elephant, it slammed into the big glass alligator cage and knocked it over, and this big twelve-foot alligator slid for liberty and plumped into the Rock River, and that was the last they ever saw of it. He said there was no doubt our alligator was his alligator, and he said he would give fifty dollars reward for it, dead or alive.

I don't know that the reward set any more people hunting the alligator, because every one who had any time to spare was hunting it already. I never saw so many people out on the river in skiffs and canoes and motor-boats as there were during July and a good part of August. And it was like old pioneer times to

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

see a rifle or a shotgun in every skiff, all loaded and laid handy for a quick shot at the alligator.

Up on our island we boys spent most of our time hunting the alligator. When we were not out in boats, we were walking along the edge of the island looking for it. It was after we had hunted the alligator for a couple of weeks that Jibby Jones got us together and we organized the Alligator Club. We called it the Alligator Club for short, but the real name was The Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley.

The Alligator Club was mostly Jibby Jones's idea, because he always believed in going at things the right way.

"I think," he said one day, "we are not hunting this alligator the right way, boys."

"What do you mean?" Wampus Smale asked. "The only way to hunt is to hunt, isn't it?"

"No," Jibby said in that solemn way of his. "No, Wampus. No, there are two ways to hunt anything—the right way and the wrong way. We have hunted for two weeks now, and we have not even seen the alligator, so we must have been hunting the wrong way. I think the trouble is that we do not know enough about alligators and their ways and habits. We ought to know more about the ways and habits of the alligator family if we are going to hunt alligators successfully."

"That sounds reasonable," I said.

"And that is why," Jibby said, "I am going to propose that we form a club to hunt the alligator in

WAS IT AN ALLIGATOR?

the right way. I suggest that we five form an alligator hunting club, The Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley, and go at this thing properly. You can see it is not enough to walk around with a gun or ride around in a boat, because we have not even seen the alligator while doing that. We will have to use something besides our guns and our legs and our boats."

"What?" Tad Willing asked. "Dynamite?"

"No," Jibby said. "My father always says the best thing to use when you want to get anything done properly is brains. We'll have to use brains if we want to exterminate that alligator."

"All right," Skippy Root said, "how will we use brains?"

"The first thing done by people who have brains and who want to accomplish anything," Jibby said, "is to organize. They get together and form a society or an association or something. Then the brains of everybody in the association can be used. And I should think that if we use the brains of all five of us we ought to have more brains at work than one alligator can show. If we organize we ought to win."

That sounded reasonable, too, so we voted to form The Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley, and formed it right there, the five of us, and I moved that Jibby be elected the President of it.

"No, George," Jibby said. "It is quite a compliment, but if this hunting is going to succeed, you should not elect me President. What I thought was that the Club would have an Admiral instead of a

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

President. Wampus owns the only motor-boat, so he should be Admiral of the Fleet."

"Does that mean I'll be the head of the Club?" Wampus asked.

"Yes," Jibby said.

"Then I move that I be elected Admiral," Wampus said, and he was mightily tickled.

We elected Wampus Admiral and then Jibby moved that Tad be Chief Scout, and that I be Head Hunter, and that Skippy Root be Secretary, Historian, Treasurer, and Assistant Admiral, and we voted that.

"But what are you going to be?" I asked Jibby.

"Well, I thought, if it wasn't asking too much," Jibby said in a modest sort of way, "I'd ask you to elect me Chief Zoölogist and Encyclopædist."

"Holy smoke!" I exclaimed. "Chief Zoölogist and Encyclopædist! What's that? What has that got to do with alligator hunting?"

"Why, you see, George," Jibby said, "some one ought to study up about alligators and their ways and habits and that is what a zoölogist does, and about the only place I can read up anything about alligators is in the encyclopædia, so I thought I ought to be called Encyclopædist too. If I was a real Zoölogist, I wouldn't mind being called just Zoölogist, but, as I am not, I think I ought to be called Encyclopædist, to show that I'm the sort of zoölogist that has to get his information out of the encyclopædist."

"And is that all the hunting you will do?" Wampus asked.

WAS IT AN ALLIGATOR?

"Perhaps," Jibby said. "But it will be the most important part, Wampus. It will be my duty to find out all about alligators so I can tell you how to find them and how to hunt them."

So we elected Jibby Chief Zoölogist and Encyclopædist, and we chose the old shack at Mosquito Hollow on our island to be the club-house. My sister May made us a flag with an alligator on it, and we took a pledge to exterminate the alligator if we could, and Jibby went down to town and brought back the "A" to "AM" volume of the encyclopædia and began to study about alligators.

CHAPTER V

THE ALLIGATOR CLUB

WHILE Jibby was studying alligators in the encyclopædia the rest of us did the best we could, but it did not amount to much. The Admiral and the Chief Scout and the Head Hunter and the Secretary-Treasurer-Historian went out every day in Wampus Smale's motor-boat and scouted up and down the river and into the sloughs, looking for the alligator.

It was a good job, too, because an alligator is about as useless as any animal in the world and nobody wanted a lot of them or even a pair or even one, to be in our part of the river and get acclimated and propagate and increase and multiply and fill our river full of alligators and danger and loose legs that had been bit off folks.

But the more we hunted the clearer it became that we would have to wait until Jibby Jones finished his job and knew all about alligators and their ways and habits. From time to time some one reported having seen the alligator, and the shanty-boat people who had hogs or chickens in coops ashore, and farmers who lived near the river or the sloughs, began to complain that the alligator was sneaking chickens or ducks or little pigs, but nobody killed the alligator. Now and then a man or a boy would say he had had a shot at it, but that was all.

THE ALLIGATOR CLUB

Parcell, the boatman down at town, had been making good money out of a bathing beach across the river from Riverbank for three or four years. He had rented the sandy beach there and fixed up bath-houses, and he made money renting the bath-houses and ferrying people across the river in his motor-boats, but now nobody would go over there to swim. Nobody swam in the river any more. Nobody was anxious to have a leg bit off in less than a minute, I guess, because—any way you look at it—having only one leg is a disadvantage, especially in a hilly town like Riverbank.

So Parcell offered a reward of one hundred dollars to any one who would kill and exterminate the alligator, and they could have the dead alligator after it was killed, and get the fifty dollars reward from Mr. Henderdon. Parcell did not want the alligator; he wanted to get rid of it.

When Parcell offered the reward we went at our scouting double hard, and we had plenty of company. Every one who didn't have anything else to do was out hunting alligator, and one of the hardest hunters and the one who kept at it steadiest was Rufus Higgs, the colored man who was the first to see the alligator, if I wasn't the first.

When I say that Rufus Higgs hunted hard I don't mean he hurt himself at it, because Rufe Higgs wasn't the sort of man to hurt himself much at anything. I mean he did not do anything but hunt alligator. Any day, if you were where Rufe was, you could see him rowing his skiff along the river edge or in a

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

slough, his rifle all ready and his eye watching the riverbank, taking his time at it, but never letting up.

In a way, I guess, Rufe Higgs sort of resented having so many folks hunting the alligator. He seemed to think this alligator was his own private alligator, because he had seen it first—or claimed he had—and it did look as if he was the best alligator hunter in our part of the country, because he was a colored man and from down South and he said he had hunted alligators year in and year out, down there, from the time he was fourteen years old until he came North, and that he had killed thousands and thousands of them. He said his folks lived in a cabin on the edge of a bayou and that the cabin was built on stakes that were driven into the water, with a sort of platform around it. He said the platform was the front yard and back yard and side yards of the cabin, and that all the little Higgs kids played on that platform, and now and then, when they were playing rough or wrestling or got careless, one of the Higgs children would fall off the platform into the bayou. Then it was “snap!” and there would be a swish in the water and that Higgs kid would never be seen again. An alligator had it.

Well, we were afraid Rufe Higgs would get the alligator before we did, and that he would get the rewards, and we tried to hurry old Jibby, but Jibby would not hurry. He read the encyclopædia and sent down to town for the “CEM-CUL” volume that had the article about crocodiles in it, and he studded that, and still he wasn’t satisfied that he knew enough about

THE ALLIGATOR CLUB

the ways and habits of saurians. That is what all the alligators and crocodiles are called. He began to have folks bring up books from the Public Library—books about Florida and Alabama and all kinds of books that might have alligators in them—and there was nothing we could do but scout around in the motor-boat and wait until the Chief Zoölogist and Encyclopædist of The Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley was sure he knew enough to tell us what to do.

Now and then we saw Rufe Higgs rowing along the front of our island or up and down the slough at the back of it, looking for that alligator. And I'll say he was a mean-looking man; I would have hated to be an alligator and have him after me. His face was as black as a stove and he had a mean sour look—ugly is what I would call it. He was not one of the colored men who smile most of the time. He wasn't even one of those who smile once in a while. He never smiled; I guessed that having so many brothers and sisters eaten by alligators had made the world seem cruel and bitter to him. Anyway, folks generally said Rufe Higgs was a sullen, cross-grained black-man, and that he was never even half decent to folks except when he wanted to get something out of them.

Rufe Higgs had a father who was as different from him as one man could be from another. His name was Zeb Higgs and he said he was a hundred years old, and he was always grinning and smiling, and when Rufe got married old Zeb took him into his shanty up there on the edge of Willow Slough, and

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

they all lived together. Before Rufe got married we used to go up to see old Zeb once in a while, but when Rufe moved in we quit. Rufe's wife was as mean as Rufe was and they always kept three or four snarling ugly dogs around the place, so we quit going there. We liked old Zeb all right, but we didn't like Rufe's wife, and she didn't want us around there, anyway. One trouble with her was that she had had trouble of her own. She had been married before, but she was so no-account that her husband had had to get rid of her, and he did, and the judge said she wasn't fit to take care of a baby, so her old husband got married again and his new wife took care of the baby, and Zora—that was her name—married Rufe. So I guess she was mad at everybody. She was light-colored and good-looking, but mean. Sometimes, when we boated by after the alligator scare began, we would see her sitting on a soap-box at the edge of the slough by their shack with a gun across her knees and a pipe in her mouth, spitting off to one side now and then and watching the water, and when we came near she would handle that gun and say, "Git along now! Don't you come nigh here! Git along, I tell you!" So we got along.

The man she had been married to was different. He was smiling and easy-going, like old Zeb. He had a pretty good little shanty on the Iowa side over back of our island, with a cornfield that was overflowed every spring and grew good corn, with his shanty right in among the corn at the edge of the river, and his name was Carter Colverton. He was about me-

THE ALLIGATOR CLUB

dium brown and not very smart—a little better than half-witted, maybe; but the girl he married was a nice girl except that she had a funny face. Her face was splotchy all over. Her color was mostly extra medium dark, like Orph Cadwallader's pipe, but it had cream-colored splotches on it, one across one eye, and one that made her ear all white, and a lot more. There were splotches on her hands, too, and on her feet, and I shouldn't wonder if she was splotched all over, but I don't know. Probably that was why she couldn't get a better husband than Carter Colverton—I guess folks don't like spotted wives as much as the other kind; not too spotted, anyway. But she was a pretty nice sort of colored girl even if she was splotched a good deal, and she was interesting to look at. She worked for my mother one winter and never stole anything. Her name was May.

Carter Colverton did a little alligator hunting, but not much, because his corn had to be looked after. Once we went by in Wampus's motor-boat and we saw Carter standing by the river looking along the edge of the river with a hoe in his hand, but May came out of the shack and saw him.

"Where's Zora May?" she called to him.

"Right here, honey," he called back, and pointed to the baby. It was playing in the driftwood.

"What you doin'?" she called to him. "If you are lookin' for that alligator you better get right back to hoeing that corn. You hear me?"

So he waved a hand at us and went back into the corn.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

You'll see why I'm telling you all this a little later on, when I tell you about the alligator sneaking up there and grabbing that Zora May baby and pulling it into the water and getting away with it. But that comes later.

We tried to hurry Jibby Jones, but he is one of the hardest fellows to hurry you ever saw. Just when we hoped he was through reading about alligators, he would find another book and start in on that, because Jibby believes in being thorough when he starts to do a thing, and at last we told him that The Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley were dead tired waiting. We said July was almost gone, and we hadn't even got a sight of the alligator, let alone a shot at it, and that it was no use for him to go and pile up a lot of knowledge and information if he was never going to use it. It would be winter before long if he kept us waiting.

"I hate to start anything when I'm only half ready, George," he said.

"Yes, I know," I said, "but it couldn't be any worse if you were half ready than it is now. We don't even see the alligator."

Well, Jibby objected a good deal, but we kept at him and at last he said he would do the best he could. He said that by rights he ought to stay in the clubhouse and study, but if we insisted he would go with us in the motor-boat when we went to hunt, and that he would give us the benefit of as much information as he had already got. So he took the three volumes

THE ALLIGATOR CLUB

of encyclopædia and six or eight other alligatorish books and went with us when we went alligator hunting in the motor-boat.

As we went along up or down the river, Jibby would look up now and then and give us advice, telling us where the most likely alligator places were, and then he would bend over and go back to studying one of his books, and that was how The Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley got into the newspaper. Joe Brink, who is reporter for the "Eagle," was out in a canoe one afternoon with his girl and he ran across us out alligator hunting, four of us with rifles and old Jibby sitting there in the stern with an encyclopædia on his knees and six or eight other books around him, and Joe Brink had to ask Jibby what he was doing.

I guess you can imagine the solemn way in which Jibby told Joe Brink about us. Anyway, the paper the next Monday had about three columns about us and how we took our Zoölogist and Encyclopædist with us when we went alligator hunting, and everybody thought it was a big joke. Even dear old Reverend Bliss, the minister of our church, wrote us a letter and said he thought a club that had an Admiral and a Chief Scout and a Head Hunter and a Secretary-Treasurer and a Zoölogist-Encyclopædist ought to have a Chaplain if it wanted to consider itself really complete, and he applied for the job and asked for a badge of the club to wear. So we elected Reverend Bliss to be Chaplain and hustled around and got up a badge, because we hadn't had any. The badge was

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

a piece of birchbark about as big as a dime, with an alligator drawn on it in ink, and we wore it pinned to our coats. So we sent one to Reverend Bliss. So we got a Chaplain, but we didn't get the alligator. Not then. Not in July.

CHAPTER VI

THE SCOOTER CUP

As July went by, we heard just as much about the alligator as ever, but the hideous saurian seemed to have gone down below town, and that made it harder for us to hunt it, because Wampus's motor-boat was not very swift and it is a good four miles down-river from our island to Riverbank, and the alligator seemed to be mostly a mile or two below that. It doesn't take long to go downstream on the Mississippi, but even a good motor-boat takes some time to run six or seven miles upstream on our river, and our folks were not any too anxious to have us go that far more than once or twice a week. The "Eagle" kept on printing its alligator news, and there was an item every now and then telling how the alligator had got a chicken or a duck or a young pig from some coop close to a slough or the river. We counted on Jibby Jones, but the trouble seemed to be that Jibby had decided that the way to get the alligator was to build the right sort of trap to catch it, and now he was trying to figure out just what was the right sort of trap.

The first thing we knew we were all so interested in the trap that we almost forget the alligator and when it came along toward August 23d, which is Wampus Smale's birthday, Skippy Root said:

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"Don't forget the race for the Scooter Cup; we ought to let Jibby into the Birch Island Speed Boat Club so he can have a try for the Scooter Cup on Wampus's birthday this year. I hate to let him in because he's so smart he'll win the cup, but I suppose we ought to."

Then he gave me a wink, because we had talked it all over—Skippy and I had—and fixed it all up beforehand. So I winked back at him and said:

"We don't have to let him in if we don't want to, because the rules say a majority has to vote for a new member to elect him, and there are only four of us in the Club, and if you and I want to keep him out of the Club we can; if we vote against him he can't get in."

Wampus didn't say anything because he didn't know what to make of what we were saying, but Tad Willing spoke up as quick as a flash. It wasn't because Jibby was sitting right there, either; Tad would have said it if Jibby had been a mile away.

"Pshaw!" Tad said; "what do you want to talk like that for? Of course, we want Jibby in the Club. Why not?"

"Well, I don't care," I said, giving him a wink; "it's nothing to me—I never win the Scooter Cup, anyway—but I just thought maybe you fellows didn't want to have Jibby compete for it, and he'll have a right to if he's in the Club. And he will win it, too, because he's always a winner. That's because he thinks," I said, grinning, "and reads up about it in a book, the way he has been reading about alli-

THE SCOOTER CUP

gators. It is a wonderful thing to know how to think and read, the way Jibby does, and then win everything."

Jibby turned his long nose in my direction and looked at me. He rather thought I was talking sarcastic talk because he had studied so long about alligators and got nowhere, but he wasn't quite sure. So then Skippy gave me another wink.

"He wins because he uses his brain the way his grandfather Parmenter did," Skippy said, "and because he has been all over the world, almost. But I don't care—elect him if you want to. But if you elect him you needn't any of you expect to win the Scooter Cup this year, because Jibby will sit down and think up something he saw in Asia or Patagonia or Kalamazoo and win the cup with it. If you elect him you'd better kiss the cup good-bye for a year; none of us will have one tenth of an iota of a chance to win it."

Jibby stared at Skippy and then sort of caressed his nose with one of his fingers.

"Now, boys," he said in a sort of hurt tone; "now, boys, you shouldn't talk about me like that. I don't want to win your cup away from you, whatever it is. I don't want to join your Club if you don't want me to. Why, I don't even know what you are talking about!"

"We're talking about the selectest club on this island," I said, thinking that might get Jibby excited. But it didn't.

"You must not misjudge me, boys," Jibby said in

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

his solemn way. "I know I'm a sort of newcomer here, and a sort of interloper in your crowd, which has been together for years, and I do appreciate the way you have let me mix in and be one of you, but I don't want you to think I expect to butt into everything just because you've been kind to me. No, indeed!"

Well, Skippy and I could hardly keep our faces straight, because we had talked this over for a week, almost, and with old Jibby sitting there and looking so owl-serious in his shell-rimmed spectacles and taking it all in dead earnest and with Wampus and Tad hardly knowing what to make of it, it was fun. But I thought it was time to come to the point, so I gave Skippy another wink.

"That's all right, Jibby," Skippy said. "Don't you make any mistake about one thing; we want you in everything just as if you had always lived here. We like you, Jibby; we're fond of you; we love you."

Any other boy, if Skippy had said that to him, would have piled into him and wrestled him and pounded him until he hollered, but old Jibby sat and thought about it for a minute, blinking.

"Perhaps," he said then, slowly, "I had better not join the Club. I'd like to, whatever it is, but if it is a club where anything is won, perhaps I'd better stay out. The trouble with me seems to be that I always do win when there is anything to be won. I get so interested, you know. And when I get interested I begin to think how I can win. And I am such an excellent thinker that I do think of ways to

THE SCOOTER CUP

win. My father says it is quite remarkable."

Well, Skippy and I just lay back and howled then, and Jibby saw there was some sort of joke and he smiled the way a fellow does when he knows there is a joke and doesn't quite know what the joke is. As soon as we could stop laughing, Skippy hit old Jibby on the back and said he was the greatest ever, and proposed him for membership in the Birch Island Speed Boat Club right there, and we took a vote. The vote was: For Jibby Jones, 4; Against Jibby Jones, 0.

Then we told him what the Birch Island Speed Boat Club was. We told him that when we were little kids we all happened to have toy boats of one kind or another and it came along to Wampus Smale's birthday. So then Wampus's Uncle Oscar said we ought to have a boat club, and he got up the name of Birch Island Speed Boat Club because the boats were of such different kinds no other name seemed to fit them all. Wampus had a toy submarine that wound up with a key, and I had a sailboat as long as my foot, and Skippy had a tin ocean liner as big as his arm, and Tad's boat was a funny sort of canal-boat thing that had a real steam engine in it that burned alcohol. Wampus's Uncle Oscar made the cup we competed for; he made it out of an old tin tomato can with the label peeled off. That year Tad's boat won the cup and the name of his boat was *The Scooter*, so we called the cup the Scooter Cup, just as the international yacht race cup is called the America Cup because the *America* was the first yacht to win it.

After that race Wampus's Uncle Oscar took a nail

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

and scratched on the cup "The Scooter Cup, Won by *The Scooter*," with the year, and he made the rule that every year on Wampus's birthday there should be a race for the cup and the fastest boat should win and hold the cup for one year.

Wampus's Uncle Oscar made the other rules for the race, and they were simple, too. The first was that the race should be on the river and start from a skiff or motor-boat ten feet off the shore in front of our cottages on Birch Island. The second was that the boats must not be over three feet long, but that any kind of boat could enter the race—power-boat or sail-boat or any kind whatever. The third rule was that the race was to last five minutes, and that it did not matter in what direction a boat went; the boat that got farthest away from the starting-place in five minutes won the cup. This was because you never can tell how the wind is going to blow or what direction a toy power-boat is going to take, especially when the river current takes a hand in the business. You may start a boat south and then a wave will hit it and turn it eastward, and then a breeze will swing it around to west or north; nobody can tell.

We explained all this to Jibby and he listened carefully.

"Would I be allowed to touch my boat after it started?" he asked, and then we knew he was interested and meant to try to win the Scooter Cup.

"No, sir!" Wampus said. "You can't touch them; touching and steering is barred after the boat starts."

THE SCOOTER CUP

"Does a boat have to be a bought boat?" Jibby asked next.

"I should say not!" Tad said. "Skippy won the cup one year with a piece of plank he put a sail on—just an old board he sharpened at one end. And one year George won with a couple of cigar-boxes fastened end to end and the works of an alarm-clock to turn the paddles. You can use any kind of thing that will float, and any kind of power you can fasten on."

"Did anybody ever enter a catamaran?" Jibby asked.

"What's a catamaran?" Skippy asked.

"A catamaran is a good boat for speed," Jibby said. "I saw them on the Orinoco River, in Venezuela, when my father was down there studying the Orinoco River for the book he is writing about rivers. They are like a canoe with a thinner canoe or a long light log fastened off to one side with outriggers. That makes the catamaran hard to upset, but lets it be speedy. I think a catamaran would be a good kind of boat to race."

"Maybe it would and maybe it wouldn't," Tad said. "You've got to remember that this is the old Mississippi and that the current counts for something in a speed race. One year I won the race with a tin dishpan."

"Was that fair according to the rules?" Jibby asked.

"Of course, it was fair," Tad said. "Anything is fair. According to the rules anything that floats is a boat. You could use the alligator, if you could get it and keep it on top of the water. You can get a cork

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

out of a catsup bottle and call that your boat, or you can leave the cork in the catsup bottle and call that your boat. Anything, just so it floats. The year I used the dishpan I had a dandy little sailboat all ready to use, but when we were ready for the start the wind was upstream, and I saw the sailboat would have no chance—it might not move at all, with the wind blowing it one way and the current pushing it the other; it might stand absolutely still. So I said, "Wait a minute!" and I ran up to our kitchen and grabbed the dishpan, and when I got down to the river I put two rocks in the dishpan to sink it low enough in the water so the wind would not catch it much, and when we rowed to the starting-place I just put the old dishpan in the water and let it float. While the other boats were fooling around doing stunts, my old dishpan started straight down-river with the current, and she won easy."

"Easily," said Jibby.

"What?"

"She won easily," Jibby said.

"How do you know she did?" Tad asked.

"I read it in a grammar," Jibby said. "The grammar says to say 'easily' and not 'easy.' I only said she won easily."

"Well, I don't care whether she won easy or won easily," Tad said, "but I know she won and has her name on the Scooter Cup. I didn't tell you so you could give us a grammar lesson; I told you so you would know that anything that floats is a boat in a Scooter Cup race. But if you enter a boat in the race

THE SCOOTER CUP

this year, Jibby, you'd better not enter a dishpan, because we've got beyond all that. That was years ago, when we were young at it, but we beat that all hollow now. The boats we enter now get up some speed, I'll tell you!"

"Yes," said Wampus, "and when it comes to Scooter Cup races your old thinker will have some thinking to do! You may think you know how to think, but you can't think speed into a boat—it has to be there in the first place. I know what you're thinking; you're thinking you'll think about all the places you've been, like the Orinoco River and the Hoko-poko River and the Jokosoko River, and think of how some pop-eyed heathen or other put a piece of cheese on the tail of a parrot and made a lion jump over a house and fall in a tub of glue and glue himself there, or something like that, and when you've thought of that for about a week you'll think you know how to win the Scooter Cup race. But that's not how the Scooter Cup race is won. Thinking is all right, but what a speed boat needs is speed. The trouble with you, Jibby, is that you think that because you can think your way to the front in one thing you can think it to the front in everything."

"Oh, I'm sure I don't think that, Wampus," Jibby said.

"Yes, you do!" said Wampus, for this had been on his mind quite a while and now was his chance to say it. "And it won't do you a bit of good when you get out to the starting-boat and put your boat in the water. I know how you are. If we were talking about hick-

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

ory nuts you would remember how some tattooed heathen in Timbuctoo used to play the flute to the bees and make them bring him honey, and you would rig up a violin out of a cigar-box and play a tune to a squirrel, and the squirrel would sing like a canary and hurry away to its nest and bring you its whole winter store of hickory nuts. Yes, and put them on a china plate in front of you and crack them for you! But this is a boat race! You remember that!"

CHAPTER VII

BOAT-BUILDING

WELL, we did think Wampus was going a little too far. We were afraid he had hurt Jibby's feelings, for Jibby sat silent quite a while, and Jibby is a good old scout, even if he does look queer. I was just going to say something to smooth things over, when Jibby looked up.

"But I don't see," he said, "why the lion should jump over the house after the parrot. Of course, if the house wasn't a big house the lion might be able to jump over it, but I don't believe lions like cheese well enough to jump over even a small house for it. Of course, I don't know all the kinds of cheese there are; I've never studied cheese. It ought to be an interesting study, and maybe I'll take it up some time. There may be some kinds of cheese that I don't know about that lions do like. You don't know what kind of cheese it was, do you, Wampus?"

Wampus did not know whether Jibby was spoofing him—as the English say—or not, but he got red in the face.

"No, I don't," he said.

"Did somebody tell you about the lion jumping over the house into the tub of glue, or did you read it somewhere?" Jibby asked.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

Wampus did not say anything; he just felt foolish and got redder in the face.

"Because," said Jibby, as serious as a judge, "I can hardly believe it is true. Of course, I've never been on the Hokopoko River or the Jokosoko River, and I don't even know where they are, but Father and I did know one pop-eyed heathen on the Orinoco River. He did not have a parrot when we knew him, but he could have got one, because there are plenty of parrots. There are thousands of parrots there. But there are no real lions near the Orinoco River."

Well, Wampus looked sick. He had tried to be sarcastic and he had missed fire by a thousand miles; either that or Jibby was ragging him terribly. The rest of us just grinned.

"And then," said Jibby, as serious as ever, "I don't just see how the pop-eyed heathen could have been sure which direction the parrot would fly. I don't see how he could have been sure the parrot would fly over the house in the direction of the tub of glue. A parrot is liable to fly in any direction, and when it has a chunk of cheese on its tail—a chunk big enough to attract a lion's attention—it is still more liable to fly in any direction, because a bird steers itself with its tail. A bird's tail is its rudder, Wampus, and when a bird's rudder is all weighted down with cheese, and maybe made lopsided, it might not fly over the house at all—it might fly in a circle or in an ellipse."

"Oh, stop!" Wampus said.

"But I do think some one has told you what is not true," said Jibby. "I do, indeed, Wampus! There

BOAT-BUILDING

doesn't seem to me to be any truth in the matter at all. In the first place I doubt that lions like cheese well enough to jump over a house for it, and in the second place I doubt that a parrot with cheese on its tail would fly straight over a house in the direction of a tub of glue, and in the third place I don't believe a lion would stick in a tub of glue. I have not known many lions personally but I think that if a lion jumped in a tub of glue it would not stay there long enough for the glue to harden; it would jump right out again. I don't know what sort of lion it was, but I think it would be a foolish lion that would sit around in a tub of glue two or three days waiting for it to harden."

"Look here!" Wampus said in an exasperated tone, "I didn't say any lion ever jumped over a house after any parrot with cheese on its tail, and I didn't say any lion sat in a tub of glue until it hardened. I said that was probably what *you* were thinking."

"But I wasn't," said Jibby. "I would never think anything like that. So you see, Wampus, you were wrong. What did you say it for?"

"My land!" Wampus exclaimed. "I don't know what I said it for. Stop talking about it! Forget it! I'll never say anything again."

"But I wish you would," said Jibby. "I'm not irritated. I only want to know what a piece of cheese and a house and a tub of glue and a lion and a parrot's tail have to do with speed boats and the Scooter Cup."

For a while Wampus sat and looked at the toe of his shoe and would not say a word. He was pretty

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

grumpy about it, as a fellow is apt to be when he thinks he has said something smart and finds it has not been as smart as he thought it was. By and by he looked up.

"I was only trying to say that when it came time to get up a boat for the speed race," he said, "you would probably think of something that had happened somewhere, and then try to twist it into a way to win the race."

"Oh!" said Jibby, as if he understood now. "Oh! And isn't it queer, I was doing just that thing? I was actually thinking of the time my father and I——"

"What?" I asked. "What about your father and you?"

"No," Jibby said, "I'd better not tell you. Wampus might think I was making fun of him."

And he would not say another word. Or not much more than a word. All we could coax out of him was that he was thinking of a time when he and his father were in Florida, studying the rivers there. That was all he would say, but when I got Skippy Root alone he and I had a good, serious talk.

"Look here," I said, "we've got to look sharp or the joke won't be on Jibby—it will be on us. I bet Wampus has spoiled the whole thing for us. Wampus has stirred old Jib up and now he'll think he has to win the Scooter Cup or perish. He'll think his head off to find some crazy way to win that cup."

"Don't you worry," said Skippy. "He can think his head off and think it over a house and back on

BOAT-BUILDING

again but it won't do him any good. Uncle Oscar might just as well begin to scratch the name of my boat on that cup right now!"

For, you understand, this was the joke we were getting ready to play on Jibby—

Skippy Root has an uncle who lives in New York, and that uncle was here the year before when Wampus had his birthday. He is a member of a yacht club—the Bayside Yacht Club—in New York, and he was mighty excited over our Scooter Cup race. He made bets with Mr. Smale and with Mr. Willing and with my father that Skippy's boat would win, and Skippy's boat never even got started; the wind blew it in under the starter's skiff and upset it, and that was as far as it ever did get. So Skippy's uncle said he would send Skippy a boat that would win the cup the next year.

Well, the boat came. I guess Skippy's uncle had hunted through every store in New York where they sold toy boats until he found the toy boat that was the best one in the lot. It was a dandy, and no mistake. It was two feet and eight inches long, and was a destroyer type, long and low and narrow, and painted battleship gray, and it had clock spring power to turn its two propellers. That spring was so strong that Skippy had to hold the boat between his knees and use both hands to turn the key.

When the boat came it was packed in a barrel, with shavings packed all around it, and I happened to be with Skippy when he unpacked it. I saw right away that no boat we other boys could buy or rig up could

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

beat that boat in a thousand years. It must have cost forty dollars.

Well, Skippy unpacked the boat and it was so wonderful we hardly dared talk above a whisper. It was just "Oh, boy!" and "Say, kid!" for about ten minutes, and then Skippy grinned.

"Listen, George," he said, "ever since Jibby Jones came up to the island I've been thinking about the Scooter Cup race, and I've been thinking old Jib would grab the cup away from us with some of his smart think-up stunts, just as he does everything else, but now we've got him! No boat on earth can beat this, and I know it, because if there was any such boat my uncle would have sent it. We'll just keep this boat dark, and not say a thing about it, and when Wampus's birthday comes we'll spring it on Jibby as a surprise. You go ahead and make some sort of boat, and I'll pretend to be rigging up some sort of boat, and we won't let Wampus or Tad or Jibby know about this one at all. We'll make Jibby look sick for once!"

A couple of days after that Skippy and I took the new boat—it was called the *Avenger*—over to the slough and tried her out. She was a wonder! We timed her, and even in the slough, where the current is not very strong, she got away quick and steady, and she ran under her clock spring power an even three minutes and went about twice as far as any boat had ever gone in a Scooter Cup race in five minutes. That satisfied us. Skippy oiled every bearing in the *Avenger* and she was all ready to enter the race.

Then we set to work on our fake boats. We made

BOAT-BUILDING

a big show of trying to fix up some kind of boats that we hoped would win the race, and we pretended we had thought hard about them. Skippy rigged up a boat with side wheels and a sort of windmill, with a belt from the windmill to the wheels. He said the idea was that the wind would blow the windmill and the windmill would turn the paddle wheels, but he fixed it so the windmill turned the wheels backwards. I made a boat I called the *Cruiser*. It had one paddle wheel at the stern and a sort of tall mast, with a pulley wheel at the top of the mast. I wrapped a good length of twine around the paddle wheel and ran the loose end over the pulley wheel and fastened a good chunk of lead to the end of the twine. The idea was that when I put the boat in the water the chunk of lead would slide down along the mast and its weight would unwind the twine that was wrapped around the paddle wheel and make the paddle wheel turn. They were both crazy ideas and we knew it, but old Jibby took them just as seriously as we hoped he would.

Jibby would come and spend hours looking at us work on our boats and tell us what was wrong, as he saw it. I pretended I was mighty well satisfied with my boat. I would wind the twine on the paddle wheel and hold the boat up, and the lead weight would slide down and the paddle wheel would simply whir! Then old Jibby would try to explain that, although the paddle wheel spun like sixty in the air, it would not spin like that when it was in the water.

"Then I'll put on more lead," I said.

"But that will make her topheavy," Jibby said.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"She'll turn upside down."

So we would argue about that awhile, and then we would take a look at Skippy's windmill boat, and Jibby would say it was all wrong and tell about windmills he had seen in Kansas or Holland or on the banks of the Nile that were better styles of windmills to put on the boat. It was a lot of fun, and all the while Skippy and I were laughing in our sleeves.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEPTUNE

WAMPUS was after the cup in dead earnest and he was making a double catamaran sailboat; with a canoe-shaped boat in the middle and two outriggers, one on either side, so his boat could carry more sail than any boat ever entered in the Scooter Cup races. Under each outrigger he put a screw eye, and he had a big sheet of tin all ready to tie to the screw eyes if there was no breeze. If there was no breeze the tin sheet would hang down in the water under the catamaran and the current would catch it and drag the catamaran downstream. It was mighty clever—cleverer than we thought Wampus could be.

Tad stuck to the boat he had used the year before, a boat he had rigged up with a spring out of an old eight-day clock on a flat board that was bent upward at the bow, like a real scooter.

The morning of Wampus's birthday was bright and fair, with a dandy breeze, not strong enough to make too many waves, and blowing down-river. The race was at two o'clock, and about noon Wampus's Uncle Oscar rowed up to the island, because dinner was a sort of birthday party for Wampus, with ice cream and a cake with candles. Everything was all ready for the Scooter Cup race, and Wampus's motor-boat was

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

moored ten feet out from the rocks in front of his cottage; it was to be the starting-boat. The judges were our mothers and fathers, and each had a skiff and a watch. Each judge-boat was to follow one of the competing boats and time it, and judge how far it had gone in five minutes.

When it got along toward two o'clock Skippy got his swell new *Avenger* out from under his bed and carried it down to the river, and when Wampus and Tad saw it they almost fainted.

"Good-night!" Tad said, and then there was nothing but examinations of the boat and exclamations and we forgot old Jibby altogether. He stood back of us and looked at the *Avenger* and he looked mighty solemn. I caught a look of his face.

"How about that, Jibby?" I asked.

"George," he said, in his solemn way, "I guess I won't enter the race this year."

"I guess not!" I said with a laugh. "I guess it won't matter if you do. I guess no boat but Skippy's will be really entered in the race at all."

"It isn't that, George," Jibby said, sad-like. "It's because that is such a beautiful boat. It is such an expensive boat. Skippy's uncle must have paid an enormous sum for it, and it would be a shame for me to win the cup with my old contraption when such a lovely boat is entered."

"Win the race?" I said. "Why you can't win the race! Don't you be afraid of winning this race! Don't be a poor sport and back out just because you've no chance. We won't like that."

THE NEPTUNE

"Well, if you put it that way, George," Jibby said, "I suppose I might as well have a little try for the cup."

Honestly, I did not like the way his eyes twinkled when he said that. For the first time I was afraid that old Jibby might have been thinking too hard for us. It sort of flashed on me that maybe he had thought of a flying boat of some kind.

"Where's your boat?" I asked him.

Jibby reached into his coat pocket. He had on a striped flannel coat that had shrunk until the sleeves did not come much below his elbows.

"It doesn't look like much," he said, meaning his boat, and he pulled out of his pocket the queerest boat that had been entered in the Scooter Cup races since the day of the dishpan. My eyes bulged out an inch. It was a rubber hot-water bottle.

Well, I yelled! Everybody turned and looked at the hot-water bottle. Then everybody screamed, even the judges, and even old Orpheus Cadwallader grinned.

"Isn't it all right?" Jibby asked anxiously. "Isn't it a fair kind of boat?"

He turned the hot-water bottle over and looked at it and looked up at the judges, and they were laughing so hard they could hardly tell him it was a perfectly good sort of boat for a Scooter Cup race, but they did tell him.

"I named it the *Neptune*," said Jibby, without a smile. "I thought that would be a good name, because when I was thinking of the time Father and I were in Florida I happened to think of Neptune."

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"All right," said Wampus's Uncle Oscar, sort of disgusted; "come along; the *Neptune* is entered. It's time the race started."

We all got in the skiffs and the judges rowed us out to the motor-boat and Wampus's Uncle Oscar and we five boys climbed in and got ready to drop our boats in the water when Uncle Oscar gave the signal at exactly two o'clock. The five judges' skiffs got all ready to follow the boats.

Wampus picked a place at the end of the motor-boat so he could put his sailboat in the water beyond the boat, where the motor-boat would not shut off the breeze—"blanket" his boat, they call it. I took the other end of the motor-boat with my silly old lead-weight contraption. Tad and Skippy were close together amidships, and old Jibby with his hot-water bottle was between Wampus and Tad. Jibby had the cork out of his hot-water bottle. He blew it full of air and screwed the cork in hard and then he did something that made me open my eyes mighty wide. He untied a string that hung from the gunwale of the motor-boat down into the water and tied the end to the handle of the hot-water bottle, and he had to hold on to the string hard, for it was jerking as if there was a horse at the other end of it. Just then Wampus's Uncle Oscar called out "Ready! All set! Go!"

I dropped my boat into the water and it gave one kick of the paddle wheel and turned upside down and went to the bottom of the Mississippi like a rock. Wampus's sailboat caught the wind and went off in a pretty curve before the wind and then straightened out

THE NEPTUNE

down the river at a good clip. Tad's little power-boat got off well. Skippy's dandy new *Avenger* took to the water like a real destroyer, going as straight as a string and making real time, as we knew it would.

It was just at that minute that Wampus's Uncle Oscar shouted, "Look out! There's the alligator!" and the brown nose of the alligator poked out of the water right in front of us and then sank back out of sight again.

But Jibby's old hot-water bottle! Oh, boy!

That hot-water bottle hardly touched the water before it went down out of sight like a diving coot, and a second later it came to the surface twenty feet away and began to cut through the water like a feather in a hurricane. It would dash twenty feet in one direction and half hesitate there, and then it would rush fifty feet in another direction as if it had gone crazy or thought it was an express train, and then it would stand on end and whirl in a circle and dive and come up seventy feet away and tear up the water like a streak of rubber lightning. In a minute it was out of sight up the river and Mr. Smale in his judge skiff was rowing like a madman, and losing out by about ten to one.

"My eye!" Wampus's Uncle Oscar exclaimed: "what's the matter with that thing? Smale won't catch up with it in a week; we've got to chase it."

He started the motor-boat and sent it up river at full speed, passing Mr. Smale as if he was standing still, and away up the river we came to the hot-water bottle. It was running around in a circle when we reached it, but in an instant it started upstream again

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

and we chased it until we came to the low wing dam that reached out from the shore above Black's Island. Then, full tilt, out of the water flashed the biggest gar pike fish I ever saw in my life, shaking its head and trying to shake loose from a string Jibby had tied around its horny beak. It made one leap over that dam and the old hot-water bottle jumped out of the air at the end of the twine and leaped after it and the whole business went on up the river as if it had just started going and was getting interested in making some real speed.

Uncle Oscar ran the motor-boat out around the end of the dam and chased after the hot-water bottle and we caught up with it just abreast of the Darby cottage at the moment when Uncle Oscar said the five minutes were up. Jibby reached down and grabbed the hot-water bottle and pulled on the string until the head of the old gar pike was above water. Then he cut the string and let the gar pike go.

"Just about five times as far as any boat ever went in a Scooter Cup race!" Uncle Oscar said. "Just about twelve miles an hour, upstream and still going strong! I don't care what anybody else says, I say Jibby J. Jones wins the cup, and I say he deserves it!"

"Why, it was nothing much," said Jibby modestly. "I don't deserve any praise. I just happened to think of a time when my father and I were in Florida and Father caught a tarpon and it pulled the boat six miles. I thought a fish would be pretty good power for a speed boat. I thought a gar pike would be a good

THE NEPTUNE

sort of power because it is a tough fish, and ambitious, and has a narrow beam and a long length."

"But why did the fish swim upstream?" Uncle Oscar asked.

"Well, you see, sir," Jibby said, "Orpheus Cadwallader caught it for me eight miles up the river about a week ago, and I expect it was homesick and wanted to hurry home."

Skippy did not say anything for quite a while. Then he said: "Pshaw!"

He was silent another long spell, and then he asked:

"But why did you call that hot-water bottle the *Neptune*? That's a foolish name for it."

"Why, no," said Jibby thoughtfully. "No, I don't think it is, Skippy. You see, I remember that Neptune used to ride around in a boat that was drawn by dolphins. That seemed to suggest the name. Of course, if you want to be exact, the hot-water bottle wasn't just like Neptune's boat; it wasn't pulled by dolphins. The trouble was that there are no dolphins in the Mississippi. If there had been any dolphins I would have had Orpheus Cadwallader catch one for me."

And then, for the first time, Skippy seemed to cheer up a little.

"Dolphins!" he jeered. "Dolphins! Don't talk to me about dolphins. I never saw one and I never expect to see one, but I'll bet fifty cents against an old shoe that when it comes to speed a Mississippi River gar pike can swim circles around the fastest dolphin that ever wagged a tail!"

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"Well, perhaps you're right," said Jibby Jones; "gar pikes do seem to hurry quite a little."

Then he added: "When they're homesick."

"Yes," I said, "or when they think an alligator is after them."

CHAPTER IX

MORE ALLIGATORS

THAT nose of the alligator poking out of the water just as Jibby's gar-pike boat started was the last we saw of the alligator that year, because with the first of September we had to go back to town and go to school—vacation was over. We had mighty little time from then on for play. Now and then we heard that Rufe Higgs or somebody had seen the alligator again, or had a shot at it, and the farmers along the river kept complaining of losing pigs and ducks and chickens, but for a while we had a different sort of alligator hunting.

We left the island that year feeling worse than we had ever felt, because Jibby Jones's father had said it was time for him to get back to New York, but when the day school opened we gave a whoop, for Jibby's father had decided to stay in Riverbank all winter. We whooped again a few minutes later when we found out that old Jibby would be in our class—the first-term class of the Freshman year—because among us little fellows old Jib would loom up like a bean-pole in an pansy bed. We had never stopped to think of it, but Jibby had lost quite a little schooling, traveling around with his father so much. And when we were in school it was even funnier, because Professor Slocum, the principal, was short and fat and when Jibby talked to him he had to bend down to do it.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

Our bunch had been eager to get out of the Grammar grades and into High School, you can bet, but we didn't expect to have any too easy a time, because the upper-class fellows had got the habit of being pretty rough with the Freshies one way and another. When we found that Jibby was going to be with us, we talked it over and we decided that we would stick together, the five of us, no matter what happened, and we shook hands on it and it was good that we did, because the first day we went to the High School one of the upper-classmen, a fellow named Keggy Hicks, came up to us and one of us asked him to give Tad Willing a chance on one of the football practice teams.

"Now, you look here, you five!" Keggy Hicks said. "You might as well know, right now, this very first day of school, that we don't want any nonsense out of any of you Freshies, especially you East-End fellows. No East-Enders is going to have even a smell of anything this year. The Big Five is going to run things just as we ran them last year, so you Freshmen just attend to your own business and keep your hands off. And we won't tell you again. This is fair warning. And you had better remember that we're bad men to fool with; we're regular alligators when it comes to being interfered with; we're all right if you leave us alone, but we're dangerous when you annoy us. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir," said Jibby, looking at Keg Hicks through his spectacles. "I think we understand what you mean, Mr. Hicks."

MORE ALLIGATORS

"Well, what are you looking at me that way for, then?" Keggy Hicks asked him.

"I always look this way," Jibby said, as solemn as an owl. "I think it is my nose; my nose gives me a queer look. But perhaps it was because I was thinking our Club ought to change its name."

"What club?" Keggy Hicks asked, turning to look at Jibby again.

"The Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley," old Jibby drawled in that slow way of his. "You see, Mr. Hicks, we formed the Club when we were up on Birch Island this summer, and the name sounds a little rude—if the Big Five are alligators. Perhaps we had better change the name."

"Huh!" Keg Hicks said. "Don't let that worry you! You kids won't do much alligator hunting around this High School. If there's any hunting done, we'll do it."

"Then may we keep the name, Mr. Hicks?" Jibby asked as polite as pie, but Keg Hicks did not even bother to answer him. He turned and walked away.

And that was just the sort of thing we had been afraid of. We were glad enough to be in High School, but we would have been just as glad—or gladder—to wait another year, because you can see from the way Keg Hicks talked to us there wouldn't be a chance for us young tads to do anything or be anything worth while. Plenty of the boys had told us so. For six years the High School had been just about owned by five fellows—the Big Five, they called themselves—and this year the Big Five were Seniors, all of them.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

They meant to boss the school and every one in it.

Well, I was boiling hot, and so were Tad and Skippy and Wampus, to have Keggy Hicks talk to us that way, but Jibby only looked after him as he walked away. After a while he said:

"I don't believe my Grandfather Parmenter would have liked to have any one give him orders the way that Hicks boy gave me orders. It may be that we young alligator hunters will have to do some alligator hunting."

"Yeh!" Wampus scoffed. "And a swell chance we'll have. We couldn't get one alligator—what chance have we to get five of them?"

"The more there are," Jibby said, "the easier they ought to be to get."

That was easy to say, but it sounded like nonsense to us, because the Big Five were the real bosses of the high school politics, and nobody had ever been able to beat them at that game. They ran the General Organization and the Clubs and the athletics and everything else.

The way it happened was this. Six years before there was a fellow in High School named Cardigan, and he was mighty smart. His father was Todd Cardigan, the political boss of our town, and I guess Cardigan studied how his father did, and then did it in High School. He picked out four other fellows and they shook hands and said they would stand by each other in everything, and Cardigan said that if they did they could boss the school and run all the school elec-

MORE ALLIGATORS

tions to suit themselves, and elect anybody they wanted to. And they did it.

That first year Cardigan picked out two Seniors and two Juniors and he was a Freshman. There is always a lot of Freshmen in High School—first-year fellows—more than all the Juniors and Seniors put together, usually. And the reason they are called Freshmen is because they certainly are fresh; they're so new at first they are afraid to speak. And that was what Cardigan knew. He knew they were like a lot of scared white mice. So he got a bunch of them together one day, just before the General Assembly when the school officers were to be elected.

"Look here, you fellows!" he said. "I've got something great to tell you. Did you ever hear of the Big Four of this school?"

Of course, they had not, because he had just invented it. The Big Four he meant were the other four fellows in his Big Five.

"Well, there is a Big Four," he said, "and it is trying to run this school. Absolutely! It is going to boss every election and elect anybody it chooses. And I'll tell you something secret—I know who the Big Four are! Briggs and Murphy, the Seniors, and Holcamp and Tutt, the Juniors. And I've got some good news for you, too; big news! I've got a pull with Murphy—never mind what!—and I've just simply forced him to agree to make the Big Four a Big Five. Yes, fellows, I said to him, 'It's all well enough to have you Seniors and Juniors run the school, but how about us Freshmen? The Freshmen have rights.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

You've got to let the Freshmen in on this!' So he's going to, fellows! If you'll back me up, so I can show him that the Freshmen mean business, he's going to let me in and make it a Big Five. And, with the numerosity of us Freshmen, all hanging together, we Freshmen can simply run the school ourselves. How about it?"

Well, that was pretty slick. The Freshies thought it was the chance of their lives, of course, and after that they looked on Cardigan as their champion and leader. They thought he had forced the "Big Four" of the Seniors and Juniors to recognize their rights when, all the time, Cardigan was the whole Big Four and the whole Big Five, and the whole everything. I guess that's how any Boss gets to be Boss in politics. He makes you think you've got to have him.

Well, after that it was easy. The Big Five ran everything. It was a close, tight, solid gang, and when one graduated the others chose some one in his place, and there was always a Big Five bossing the school and electing its own favorites and having its own way.

What made us sick, now that we were going into High School, was that we thought Tad Willing, of our crowd, had the stuff in him to be one of the best football quarterbacks you ever saw go around an end with the pigskin. We knew it and Tad knew it, but nobody else knew it. He hadn't waked up to it, and neither had we, until right at the end of the last season, when it was too late to prove anything, but we were dead sure that if he could get some good training on

MORE ALLIGATORS

one of the High School teams he would be big—mighty big! And now we knew he hadn't a chance in the world to get on even the scrubbiest of the scrub elevens. The Big Five had everything all fixed just as they always got together and fixed all that sort of thing before school took up. So Tad did not have a ghost of a show and we knew it. Nobody from our end of town was going to get a smell of anything whatever this year. All five of the Big Five were from the West End and we East-Enders were absolutely out of it!

As we went along home that afternoon Wampus Smale said what he thought of it. I did, too. And so did Skippy Root and Tad. We were going along, grumbling and saying how mean and raw the deal was, as outsiders usually do, when Jibby Jones took off his shell-rimmed spectacles and wiped them and put them back on that extra-size beak of his.

"It's a nice day," he said, drawling out the words. "This is one of the days I'm glad I haven't a boil on the end of my nose. If I live long enough I'll be one hundred and seven years old the year after I'm one hundred and six years old. I've got four fingers and a thumb on my left hand."

It did sound crazy. We all stopped and looked at Jibby. He had his left hand held up in front of him now, looking at it as if he had never seen it before, and he started to count the fingers on that hand.

"One—two—three—four!" he counted. "Four fingers. And a thumb. That makes five. Five on the left hand and only five on the right hand. Wait a minute!"

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

Well, I've seen Jibby Jones do some queer things since he came to Riverbank, and I've heard him say some queer ones, but the thing he did next was about the queerest I ever did see him do. He took hold of his left hand with his right hand, as if he was going to shake hands with himself, and then he gave his left hand a yank and yanked it around toward his right side. Then he grabbed his right hand with his left hand and yanked it around toward his left side. Hard, too! And then it was just yank, yank, yank—first one hand then the other, as if his two hands were having a wrestling match or a tug of war. He yanked up and down and back and forth and crossways and every-which-way. Then, all of a sudden, he stopped and looked at the two hands, which were still clasping each other.

"Well!" he exclaimed, as solemn as an owl, and he bent over and looked at the ground. He looked all around.

"Great cats!" I said; "what are you looking for?"

"Sawdust," he said. "There ought to be sawdust, but I don't see any."

"What do you mean—sawdust?" Wampus Smale asked.

"It's queer!" Jibby said, as if to himself. "It is indeed queer! I don't believe I sawed a bit of wood."

"Wood?" Wampus asked, sort of sneery. "Wood? What wood?"

"I don't know," Jibby said. "There must be a lot of wood in the world that needs sawing. And I worked hard just now. But I don't seem to have made any

MORE ALLIGATORS

sawdust. I don't seem to have sawed any wood."

"The poor man has gone dippy!" Wampus scoffed. "What's the matter with him? Talking about nice days, and not having a boil on the end of his nose, and living to be one hundred and seven, and counting his hands, and not sawing any wood!"

"Now, hold on!" I said, because I'm always mighty careful when Jibby Jones does or says any of his queer things. "Maybe he don't make sense, but don't be too quick saying so. I bet that in about a minute he'll give us some story about when he was with his father in Central America or at the North Pole or in New Zealand. It's a riddle, maybe."

Everybody laughed—all of us but Jibby.

"I'll bite! Why did you say it was a nice day, Jibby?" Tad asked, sort of teasing, but sort of wanting to know, too.

"I said it was because it seems to be," Jibby said. "Only, I'm probably wrong about it. Probably it isn't a nice day. I was beginning to think it was a miserable, cold, wet, chilly, rainy, muggy, sticky day—the way you were all grumbling."

"But we were not grumbling about the day," said Skippy Root. "We were grumbling about the way the Big Five runs things. We were kicking about the way the Big Five shuts us out of everything worth while in the High School."

"Oh!" said Jibby, as if he hadn't known it all the time. "Oh! And are you going to keep on grouching and grumbling and complaining about that until I'm one hundred and seven years old? You're like the peo-

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

ple who are always grumbling about how the town is run, or the State is run, or the country is run, aren't you?"

"Well, that's what I say," said Wampus. "That's just what we are. We're the common people. We're the outsiders. The Big Five——"

Up went old Jibby's right hand again, with the fingers all spread out. He looked at it, then he put up his left hand, with the fingers all spread out, and first he looked at one hand and then at the other.

"Big Five!" he said and looked at his right hand. "Left hand!" he said and looked at his left hand. "Big Five—Left Hand; Big Five—Left Hand!" And then he grabbed his hands together again and began yanking them back and forth, just as he had before. Well, I caught on that time, and so did Wampus and Skippy and Tad. The Big Five was only five, after all, and we were five—just as many. Keg Hicks and his four might be the Big Five, but we were a Little Five.

"I get you!" Skippy Root cried. "I'm on! I know what you mean, Jibby; you mean, 'Don't sit outside and grumble.' You mean 'Jump in and tackle the Big Five——' "

And all Jibby said was nothing. Not a word! He just bent down and looked at the sidewalk in front of him and to the left of him and to the right of him. And Skippy's face went glum again.

"That's so!" Skippy said, sort of blue-like again. "That won't saw any wood; that won't make any saw-dust; that won't get us anywhere."

MORE ALLIGATORS

"Now, hold on!" I said. "Wait a minute! I want to ask Jibby just one thing. He said he was glad he didn't have a boil on the end of his nose. What did you say that for, Jibby?"

"I was thinking," Jibby said. "I was thinking of one time when my father was in the Far North, studying the Mackenzie River, and the Acutamish Eskimos were choosing a chief. That was the year the Crazy Bear came across the ice from Victoria Land—the big polar bear that had gone crazy and thought it had to kill every dog and seal and man and woman in the Far North. And it did kill Pushwattock, the old chief of the Acutamish tribe. So they had to choose a new chief."

Jibby stopped then. We waited, but he did not say any more.

"All right," Tad said. "Go on. Tell us the rest. That may mean something to you, but we don't know the rest of the story."

"I thought maybe you could guess it," said Jibby. "My father had a rifle, you know."

"Well, what of that?" Wampus asked.

"There couldn't be but one thing, could there?" asked Jibby. "The Acutamish Eskimos had nothing but bows and arrows and spears, and it was the chief's job to kill the Crazy Bear. And the Acutamish Eskimos are not brave—not at all brave. So they got together and made my father a member of the Acutamish tribe, and then they held a big council in the dead chief's igloo and told my father they would make him chief of the tribe, if he was willing. It was a great honor."

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"Oh, boy!" exclaimed Tad. "I should think so. All he had to do was to go out and kill a crazy bear!"

"Lead the tribe out to kill it," Jibby corrected him.

"Well, did your father accept?" I asked.

"No, he didn't," Jibby said. "He did not dare to. He was afraid."

"Of the bear?" Wampus asked.

"No, of the Eskimos," Jibby answered. "Because electing a new chief is a great ceremony among the Acutamish Eskimos. There is always a ten-day feast, and all the men and women have to greet the new chief enthusiastically ten times each hour for ten days, night and day. And, you know, there are twenty-four hours in a day, and there were one hundred and six Acutamish Eskimos in the tribe. That meant that Father would have to have been enthusiastically greeted 10 times 24 times 106 times, and that is twenty-five thousand four hundred and forty times. And so Father was afraid. Because the way the Eskimos greet a person is by rubbing noses. And Father had a boil on the end of his nose."

Well, we all grinned at that, but Skippy Root was sort of thoughtful and he said:

"I know what you mean, I guess. You mean that if we five hang together like the fingers and thumb of a left hand we'll be almost as strong as a right hand—we'll be almost as strong as the Big Five. And you mean that every Big Five or Little Five that means to get anywhere or get anything done has to have a leader. And you mean that it can't have a leader that is at all in the wrong; it has to have a leader that hasn't

MORE ALLIGATORS

a boil on the end of his nose. And you mean that you're willing to lead us in a fight against the Big Five, and to try to get some respect from Keg Hicks and his bunch for the rest of the fellows in school. Is that it?"

Jibby raised his nose in the air, like a rabbit sniffing the breeze.

"I do declare!" he exclaimed. "I believe I begin to smell sawdust! I do believe we are sawing wood! I do believe The Five Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley are going to get on the trail of the Five Big Bosses of the Riverbank High School!"

CHAPTER X

THE LEFT HAND

So that was how we started the Opposition Party in our High School, but we were never called that or anything else. When our Little Five were having a war council we sometimes called ourselves "The Alligator Hunters" and sometimes "The Left Hand." Sometimes we called Jibby "Old Thumb," because he stuck out, sort of, from the rest of us, and sometimes we called him "Zoölogist," and the Left Hand Alligator Hunters got to work to clean up the bosses of our High School politics, so everybody might have a fair show.

I'll say I didn't see how we Alligator Hunters were going to do anything much, even if we did have Jibby Jones as a leader. We knew well enough that Keg Hicks and the rest of the Big Five had been "laying pipes"—as the politicians say—all summer, and that they had everything all arranged, and were ready to rush everything through just about the way a steam roller would crush a lot of eggs. They weren't likely to leave any weak spots in their plan. Real bosses don't.

Our High School—Riverbank High School—is like a town: everybody votes. That is called the General Organization, and everybody that pays twenty-five cents is a member and a voter, and—of course—

THE LEFT HAND

everybody does pay the twenty-five cents and belongs and can vote. The meetings of the General Organization are on Monday mornings, just after nine o'clock. School begins the first Monday after Labor Day, and the first meeting of the General Organization is the second Monday after Labor Day. That gives time for every one to join the General Organization and for school to get settled down to steady work.

At this first meeting all the officers are elected for the year, and the President of the General Organization is President of the School. There are other officers, too. There is an Executive Board, that really runs things. It is one boy and one girl from each class, and they are elected by the classes—just about the same as the Mayor of a town is elected by the whole town, but the Aldermen are elected by the wards—one or two from each ward. But the President of the General Organization is also the President of the Executive Board, and in Riverbank High School that was Keg Hicks, the Boss of the school and of the Big Five.

Now, in Riverbank High School there are three things that count—athletics (which includes football), the Drama League, and the Lit. The Lit. is the Literary Society. Only a few care anything about the Drama League or the Literary Society, but everybody is wild about the athletic things—baseball, football, basket-ball, and track teams—all the time. And that was where Keg Hicks was strong. He was no athlete himself, of any sort, because he was one of the fat-boy sort, but he had picked out for the other

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

four members of his Big Five the four best men—the best football man, best baseball man, best basket-ball man, and best track man.

That was where Keggy Hicks was pretty slick, too, because here is something special: there was no separate athletic organization. The Lit. was a separate organization and the Drama League was a separate organization, but the General Organization was supposed to have entire charge of all the High School athletics, and said how much should be spent on basket-ball and how much on football, and what matches should be played. Only—and this was the joker—the Executive Board really did it all and did not let the General Organization do anything, and Keggy Hicks was the Boss of the Executive Board, because he and the Big Five picked it out and told the General Organization who to elect and who not to elect. And that was what we were up against. Keg Hicks just walked over everybody and had his own way. If he told the Football Committee of the Executive Board, "I don't want any East-Enders on any of the football squads!" that settled it; no East-ENDER got on any squad. And that was why Tad Willing did not have a chance in the world unless old Jibby Jones did some mighty tall thinking. We had only one week, too, or Monday morning would come around and Keg would have his whole crowd elected and we would be nowhere. We had to work quick.

Well, that night we four—Tad and Skippy and Wampus and I—went over to Jibby's house to talk things over and make our plans and have the first

THE LEFT HAND

meeting of the Left Hand. For a while we all talked at once, but we did not get anywhere. It was just so much noise and nothing else. Then each of us tried to think of some way to whack at the Big Five and knock Keg Hicks and his bunch out of business, but that did not get us anywhere, either.

"I wish they were feathers," Skippy Root said "If they were and we could turn all this breath we are wasting on to them, we'd blow them away, and that would be the end of them. They'd be out and we could step in."

"That's the idea," Wampus Smale said. "The question is, 'How can we overthrow the Big Five?' I wish I was Napoleon Bonaparte."

Jibby Jones had been sitting on the edge of his bed, hugging his knees, but the moment Wampus mentioned Napoleon Bonaparte, old Jibby got up and began walking up and down, grabbing one hand with the other and pulling one hand one way and then pulling it the other.

"Sawdust!" he exclaimed. "Bonaparte! Napoleon! Wait! I've got it! That's the idea—Napoleon Bonaparte!"

"You bet!" Wampus cried, as tickled as a patted dog to think old Jibby liked what he had said. "Out of the window—that's what Napoleon Bonaparte would have done with Keg Hicks and his Big Five."

"Would he?" asked Jibby, as if he was surprised. "I did not know that was the way Napoleon Bonaparte did. I wasn't thinking of that way."

"How did he do, then?" Wampus asked.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"Why," said Jibby, "as I remember it he first showed he was a strong man—won some battles and so on—and when the Big Five of his day had seen that Napoleon Bonaparte was a strong man he went to them and said, 'You see how strong I am; I'm worth taking notice of, ain't I? How about letting me be one of your gang?' "

"That's right," I said. "First he was nobody, then they let him be one of the Big Bunch, and then he was one of the Three, and then—later on—he was the One and Only. That's how it happened."

"And that's how to change undesirable conditions everywhere," Jibby said. "Generally you can't throw down a fort, but you can get inside of it. The way to get your rights is to get into the circle that is running things. If we amount to anything we ought to be able to show Keg Hicks we deserve something. We must show him we are strong."

"But we're not," Wampus said. "It's all right to talk, but we're just a bunch of Freshies."

"And the Big Five are rooted as solid as an oak," said Tad. "They are wise old owls, too. They're all Seniors."

"I knew a man once," said Jibby Jones, "who went to a hardware store and bought a brand-new ax, and he cut down an oak tree that was two hundred years old. And it did not take him two hundred years, either. He did it in a day. With a brand-new ax. If he had waited until he was two hundred years old, he would have been dead. And the ax would have been iron dust, maybe. Ha!"

THE LEFT HAND

The way he exclaimed "Ha!" made us know he had got some idea in that thinker of his. And it was so, too.

"Oak!" he said to himself. "Two hundred years! Seniors!"

We kept still and waited.

"If the oak was two hundred years old," Jibby said, still talking to himself, "it would be hollow inside. It might be easier to cut down than a young oak. It might be ready to fall down of its own weight. Seniors! The Big Five are all Seniors. They all graduate next June. That's it! That's the hollow spot. That's the weak spot. And we are Freshies—we're just starting in the High School—we've got years to go yet. That's one of our strong spots."

Well, we saw what he meant. Maybe the General Organization would be less afraid of Keg Hicks and the Big Five because the Big Five were all Seniors and due to leave High School soon. That was a mistake Cardigan had never made; Cardigan always kept his Big Five well assorted—he had one or two from each year, so it could "carry on" even if some did graduate and drop out. Keg Hicks had gone too far; he had tried to hog everything for the Seniors and the West End, and he had done it.

So we talked that over and each of us said his say, and while we talked Jibby Jones got a pencil and began writing something. He folded the paper and put it in his pocket.

"What was that?" I asked him. "What were you writing?"

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

So he took it out and showed it to us. At the top of the sheet he had written "Ultimatum," which means the last and least any one is willing to take when there is a difference of opinion. Under that he had written "President of the School, Keggy Hicks," and under that, "Vice-President of the school, Anna Waters." Anna Waters was a Senior, and lived next door to Jibby, so she was an East-Enders, too. Then, for Secretary and for Treasurer and for Corresponding Secretary he had three of the Big Five. And under them he had written "One half of Executive Council to be East-Enders." And under that was "Tad Willing to be on football squad." And under that was "Big Five to be Big Six; Jones to be new member."

By "Jones" he meant himself. Think of the nerve of it! There we were, five green Freshies up there in a ten-by-twelve bedroom, making out an ultimatum that was to break up the long-established "ring"—and what did we have to do it with?

"That's fine!" I said, sort of sarcastic; "but you said we had to show we were strong."

"Well," said Jibby, "we are, but we don't know it yet. Anybody who stands up for the rights of others is strong somehow. The only trouble with us is that we don't know how we are strong. There must be somebody in the past history of the world that had the kind of strength we have. All we have to do is to think who it was, and then do as he did. We can begin with Adam and Eve and think along down—"

But we never did. Even while we were yelling at

THE LEFT HAND

the joke of beginning with Adam and Eve and thinking of everybody since them, old Jibby's face took on that far-away both-sides-of-his-nose look.

"Adam and Eve!" he mumbled. "Adam *and* Eve! Eve!"

That did settle it! All of Jibby's stray ideas must have come together in that old head of his with a "Pop!" when he said that. They had been floating around loose and that "Eve" was like a magnet, drawing them all together into an ax, as you might say, to whack at that old Big Five tree with.

"The girls!" Jibby said. "The girls have never had a fair share in the school government. They go in for the Drama League and the Lit. There hasn't been a girl on the list of officers for years, has there? And hardly any on the Executive Council? It's not fair!"

"But, my goodness! they don't want to be on it," said Tad. "They don't care a pin for the athletics. They don't care whether it is fair or not."

"They might if we told them," said Jibby, "and more than half the students of Riverbank High are girls. The girls alone could carry any election. The Left Hand stands for Girls' Rights! How much did the Executive Council allow for the girls' basket-ball teams last year?"

"I don't know," we all said.

"We favor an increase, anyway," said Jibby. "And if we can get the girls interested we'll have a majority. And we stand for Equal Rights for All Years. For the Freshies and Juniors, as well as for the Seniors. The Big Five is all Seniors. We'll try to get the

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

Freshies and Juniors to back us up—and they are more than two thirds of Riverbank High. And we're East-Enders, so all the East-Enders ought to be with us, and they are half the school. We're strong! We represent all the girls, and all the Freshies, and all the Juniors, and all the East-End Seniors. There's nobody against us but the West-End Seniors!"

Well, that was a new way of looking at it. But old Jibby was not satisfied.

"And quite a few of the West-End Seniors must be sore because they are not in the inside ring," he said. "And I should be surprised if one or two of the Big Five itself were not sore at Keg Hicks—in a sort of way—because a Big Boss like Keg Hicks has to be mighty rough and harsh-handed now and then. Tomorrow night we'll have a meeting of Freshies and Juniors and East-Enders and girls—all we can get together—and we'll talk to them straight and show them the ultimatum, and we'll go to the General Organization meeting next Monday with an 'All Riverbank' ticket and ask to have it elected. But before then," Jibby said, "Keg Hicks or one of the Big Five will come to see if we won't be nice and friendly and play in their yard."

CHAPTER XI

ON TO VICTORY

WELL, it happened just that way. Long before the next Monday things began to happen. The next morning, when I went over to get Jibby to walk to school with me, his mother said he wasn't home—that he had gone over to Anna Waters's house, and when I was on the way to school I heard a kid shouting "Jibby Jones has got a girl! Jibby Jones has got a gir-rul!" and when I looked I saw old Jibby walking with Anna Waters and carrying her books and talking to her. And she was talking to him, too. Excited, and peppy. And Jibby as solemn as an owl. And here's what Jibby got Anna Waters to do:

Anna was a Leader in the Literary Society. The Literary Society is the organization that has the debates, to improve public speaking. It has all the boys and girls who are not afraid to stand up and talk out loud in public. And that morning, in every classroom, one of the best of the talkers got up as soon as school called, and said to the teacher something like, "Teacher, I arise to ask a favor on behalf of a large number of the students. For several years there has been an attempt to ignore the students from the East End in the General Organization, and we boys and girls from the East End resent it. We say nothing, but we resent it. We think the East End

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

is as good as the West End. We are not ashamed of the East End. So we ask you, teacher, dear, to change the seats of all of us and put all the West-Enders in the seats on the west end of the classroom, and all the East-Enders in the seats on the east side of the room. The East End is not ashamed of the East End."

Well, there was plenty of talk in each room, and the teachers wanted to know if this was in earnest, and all the East-Enders said it was. The West-Enders did not say a thing; how could they? They were so surprised they sat and stared. The teachers looked puzzled and thoughtful and said they would have to consider the matter. Then school went on as usual, but that noon something else happened.

Professor Slocum, the Principal, heard of the seat-changing request, of course, and he sent a note to every teacher, and at noon all the teachers and every one of the debaters who had stood up and talked were in Professor Slocum's office.

"Miss Carter," he said to one of the teachers, "I have heard of a certain change in the seating arrangement of your room that was requested this morning. Who made that request?"

"It was Miss Waters," said Miss Carter.

"Miss Waters," said Professor Slocum, and mighty serious, too, "you asked for this change of seats. It was asked for in each room. That seems to indicate a prearranged plan. May I ask who suggested the plan?"

ON TO VICTORY

"Yes, Mr. Slocum," she said, "the Freshman boy named Jibby Jones suggested it."

"And may I ask why?"

"Because a great many of us are not satisfied with the way the school is being bossed by Keg Hicks and the Big Five, Mr. Slocum," Anna said. "We don't think he is fair. He doesn't give the girls any offices, and he doesn't give the East-Enders any consideration at all. He has a group called the Big Five that bosses everything, and they are all Seniors, and that is not fair to the Freshies and Juniors—they're not allowed to take part in anything whatever. And that's not fair, Mr. Slocum! We think we have some rights and we are only trying to stand up for them. We all think as Jibby Jones does."

"Jones, you say?" said Professor Slocum. "Is that the boy with—"

"With the large nose—yes, sir," said Anna.

"I would like to talk to Jones a moment," said the Principal. "Do you know where he is?"

"Not positively," Anna said, "but he told me he would be waiting in the hall when I came out, to hear what you said."

"Miss Carter," the Principal said to one of the teachers, "please ask Jones to come here." And when Jibby got there, Professor Slocum studied him for about a minute before he spoke to him. Jibby stood there, twirling a sheet of paper in his fingers, waiting to see what was going to happen.

"Jones," said Professor Slocum, "I understand you are at the bottom of this request that all the students

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

from the East End be seated together. I would like to have you explain it. We are beginning a new school year to-day and I had hoped it would be a year of earnest hard work, with every one attending to the business in hand. Instead, if you make bad use of this power you seem to have, we will have a year of tumult and inattention. Do you want that?"

"No, sir," Jibby Jones said.

"On the other hand," said Professor Slocum, "I understand you planned this seating request because there is dissatisfaction with the way in which a few boys are believed to have tried to 'boss' the General Organization and all the student affairs, with injustice to some. That, if it is the case, must be corrected if I can correct it. Now, Jones, exactly what is it you want?"

Jibby handed to Professor Slocum the paper he had been twisting in his hand, and it was our "ultimatum." Professor Slocum read it aloud: "President of the school, Keggy Hicks; Vice-President, Anna Waters," and so on down to "One half of the Executive Council to be East-Enders" and "Big Five to be Big Six; Jones to be new member." When he reached the end, Professor Slocum thought for a minute, and then he said:

"Jones, I mean to keep my hands off the student organizations as completely as possible and as long as they are conducted in a way that does not interfere with or harm the school. None of these things you want is unfair, but none is a thing I can dictate. The General Organization will choose such officers and

ON TO VICTORY

committees as it pleases. Our coach will decide whether Tad Willing deserves to be on the team or not. The 'Big Five' is not a recognized school committee or organization and I cannot order it to take you into its circle. You know that, Jones."

"Yes, sir," Jibby said, as polite as anybody.

"And, furthermore," said Professor Slocum, quite sternly, "I cannot permit this rearrangement of seats. I cannot permit school politics to interfere in any such way with the right of the teachers to seat the students as they think best. But, Jones," said the Professor, smiling, "if your idea is to show the strength of the movement for equal rights for all, I have no objection to giving you the use of the Assembly Hall any afternoon before the meeting of the General Organization—any afternoon you wish, Jones! It seems to me that if you held a caucus, or a convention, of your East-End students and the Freshmen and Juniors and the girls—of all those who have cause to feel they have been unjustly treated—you might make a showing that would be as effective as any rearrangement of the seating of the students."

"Yes, sir," Jibby said gravely.

"But, of course," said Professor Slocum, "I shall have to give Mr. Keggy Hicks and his party the same opportunity to show their strength and to hold their caucus. As you happen to be here now, Jones, I'll ask you what afternoon you choose?"

Well, old Jibby hesitated about ten seconds and seemed to be thinking whether he would say something special or not, and then he said:

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"We'll take this afternoon, Mr. Slocum; we'll have our caucus right after school lets out."

So that was fixed. Along about two o'clock the teachers gave us a five-minute recess, and all of us who were for equal rights hustled around and invited everybody who was for us to come to the caucus, and after school the Assembly Hall was almost packed. Even the East-End Seniors came, and when Anna Waters read the ultimatum—all but the last item of it—and asked all who favored it to give the school yell the noise almost took the roof off. They heard that yell clear across the Mississippi, over in Illinois. And Keggy Hicks and his gang never did have a caucus. Professor Slocum went to him and offered him the Assembly Hall, but he said he guessed he would not bother.

Well, you know how politics is and how many unexpected things happen in it. When it came to the general meeting we did not know what would happen. Some of us were plenty worried. We did not like that idea of Keg Hicks thinking it was not worth while having a caucus—it looked as if he was so sure of having his way that he had not cared to bother about one. The crowd began to pile into the Assembly Hall early, everybody trying to get seats up front, and all kinds of twisted rumors and exciting talk kept humming around. There would be a big group around one fellow one minute, and then everybody would rush to the other side of the room and crowd around another fellow, and then a bunch would begin chanting "Keg! Keg! Old Keg Hicks!" and some of our

ON TO VICTORY

fellows would break in and chant "Jones! Jones! Jibby J. Jones!" and girls would rush here and there and talk like sixty to some fellow they thought was against us. You could not have heard a ton of bricks fall on a tin roof there was so much noise. And then, suddenly, Professor Slocum rapped with his gavel and it was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop.

Professor Slocum said it was the annual meeting of the General Organization and that it would be entirely in the hands of the students and asked some one to nominate a Chairman. There was silence for just one minute and then Keg Hicks stood up.

"I nominate——" he said.

Well, I guess about nine out of every ten there got ready right then to vote against whoever he nominated, but Keggy ended in a way we did not expect:

"I nominate," he said slowly, "Oliver Parmenter——"

You could hear the crowd getting angry. They did not want any Oliver Parmenter, whoever he was. But Keg kept right on.

"I nominate," he said, with a half grin, "Oliver Parmenter Jones, better known to most of us as Jibby Jones, one of the most up-and-coming members of the student body of Riverbank High School."

Say! I bet nine out of every ten there yelled out "I second——" or "Second the nomination!" or something, or just yelled. And when Professor Slocum asked for a vote, ten out of every ten voted "Aye!"

And the rest of that meeting was just peaches and

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

cream for us—just simply pie and candy! The minute Professor Slocum stepped down from the platform, Anna Waters nominated Keg Hicks for President and he was seconded and elected with a whoop, and Anna Waters was nominated and seconded and elected in just the same way! Everything on our “ultimatum” that the General Organization had a right to vote on went through the same way, too. The East-Enders and the Left Hand and the Equal Righters and the Young Alligator Hunters and the Freshies and the Juniors and the East-End Seniors all got what they wanted, and everything was O.K.

On the way home I said to Jibby: “Well, we did it! It was a glorious victory, and no mistake! But I was afraid right up to the end, weren’t you?”

“Why, no, George, not very,” Jibby drawled. “You see, George, Keggy Hicks came to me right after we had that caucus and said to me, ‘Jones, you’ve got us beat to a frazzle; what do you want?’ and I gave him our ultimatum and said, ‘This is what we want, Mr. Hicks,’ and he read it and said, ‘I’ll fix it’; and so I wasn’t surprised, George.”

But the big compliment that Jibby got came the next day when Professor Slocum himself stopped Jibby.

“Jones,” he said, “I am glad you are a student in Riverbank High. You have shown what can be done in changing bad conditions if people don’t just sit around and grumble. I think you can be a good influence in this school. And I’m going to ask you to do something for the school.”

“What is it, Professor Slocum?” Jibby asked.

ON TO VICTORY

"I want you to get up some sort of new organization to interest some of these boys who don't care for athletics or the Lit. or the Drama League. Something to keep them out of mischief. Think it over, Jones."

"Yes, sir," Jibby said. "I will. Thinking is one of the things I do best."

CHAPTER XII

THE BAND

WELL, for a few days after The Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley had licked the Big Five in the election contest, Jibby went around with his forehead wrinkled and his long nose up in the air, thinking how he could form some sort of organization that would interest some of the boys who were not interested in athletics or literature or drama.

For a while he thought of trying to get those boys to join the Young Alligator Hunters, but we would not have that—we did not want any more fellows in the Club. Then he thought of organizing The Riverbank High School Saurian Nature Club, and he wrote out a constitution for it, saying its object was to “study saurian natural history, including the manners and habits of alligators, crocodiles, lizards, pterodactyls, ichthyosaurs, plesiosaurs, and all other amphibians, chelonians, ophidians, and crocodilians, as well as how to hunt and tame the same,” but none of the fellows seemed anxious to join, so he gave that up. But you can’t stop old Jibby, and by and by he got an idea that came mighty near giving the Riverbank High School the worst defeat it ever had. It came mighty near being the blackest eye our school ever got, and I hope we’ll never come as near it again. The school will never get over talking about it.

THE BAND

Our school, you understand, is pretty good at athletics and all kinds of games. We get beaten now and then, of course, just as every school does, but all through the State we have a reputation. Whenever old Riverbank High is entered in a contest, the other schools sit up and take notice, because it means there is going to be a good contest—if the other contestant can put up any sort of fight.

In baseball or football or any other game you can pretty well figure on Riverbank standing six hundred to one thousand, and in the Inter-School Debates we usually win. And we're usually mighty near the top of the heap in anything we tackle.

Well, that's all right. It's bully, and our bunch was proud to be in such a school, even if we were only Freshies. Tad had got on the football squad, and Skippy was in the Lit. (which is the Literary Society), and Jibby was helping the Big Five run the whole school, and only Wampus and I were not in anything special. I did not care much, because Latin and Algebra made me hump myself pretty hard just then and I thought maybe I would get into the Drama League when it got ready to put on a show, but Wampus wanted to get into something right away. He kept nagging at Jibby to hurry up and get the new club—whatever it was going to be—going right away, and so one day Jibby said:

"I think I have thought of the thing our school ought to do, Wampus, and it is something you can be in, too. Riverbank High ought to be winning some of the State High School Band contests. Riverbank

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

High has never had a band, and it ought to have one."

"But I don't know anything about music," Wampus said. "I don't know how to play any instrument. How can I play in a band when I don't know how to play anything?"

Jibby Jones thought about this for a minute.

"You might do the way my Uncle Oglethorpe did," Jibby said. "My Uncle Oglethorpe weighed two hundred and eighty-six pounds, and he used to brag that how he got all that weight was no secret at all. He got it by eating. He was the biggest and oftenest eater you ever saw. He could eat more beeksteak or potatoes or corned beef or anything than any other man, I do believe! He was a wonderful eater. And my Uncle Oglethorpe used to take a big bite of pie or something and lean back in his chair and gasp once or twice and say:

"'Ain't it wonderful! Ain't it marvelous! Ain't it downright surprising how well I can eat! And eat anything, too! And the remarkable thing is that there was a time, for a few weeks after I was born, when I couldn't eat a thing! Don't it beat all to see how I can eat now and then think I had to learn how from the ground up! Why, folks, when I was born I didn't even have any teeth to eat with!'"

"Sure!" said Wampus. "That's all right; but what can I learn to play in time to be in a band this year?"

"The bass-drum," said Jibby. "I never played a bass-drum, but it looks as if all you had to do was hit it once in a while. You don't have to learn to play scales on it, or how to tune it up like a fiddle."

THE BAND

"Well, I don't want to be the only one of our crowd to be in the band," Wampus said.

"George can be in it," Jibby said.

At first I shied, because I guess a million people have told me I have about as much ear for music as a rusty pump has, but before I could say so, Jibby spoke up.

"George will be in the band," he said. "If he can't do anything else he can carry water and take care of the tune-books, and when the band parades he can wear your bass-drum on his back while you pound it."

"All right!" I said. "Anything to help good old Riverbank High!"

"And I'll be in the band, too, if you'll allow me," said Jibby.

"Can you play an instrument?" I asked, mighty surprised, for this was the first I had heard of it.

"Only one," said Jibby modestly. "I don't often mention it because the last time I played it, Father was arrested because I was disturbing the peace. It's a pucco-molo."

"A what?" I asked.

"A pucco-molo," Jibby said. "It's a horn. It's like a slide-trombone, only it is made of wood and is noisier. My father bought one for me when we were on the island of Kana-Kana, for a curiosity, because it is the loudest musical instrument in the world. The volcano of Wata-Wata is on the island of Kana-Kana and all the inhabitants are pearl-divers. They dive in the ocean for pearls. Sometimes they go out five miles in their catamarans and dive one hundred feet deep.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

So when the volcano begins to erupt and all the men are five miles away and one hundred feet deep in the ocean, dressed in their rubber diving-suits, and perhaps with cotton in their ears, the Hutawave—or Official Alarm Blower—picks up the pucco-molo and blows on it, and the divers hear him and hurry home.”

“Some horn!” Tad said.

“Yes,” Jibby said. “And my father cautioned me never to blow full force on it, but one day I did. It was in Chicago, and when I blew the pucco-molo the fire department and the reserve police all came running, and Father was fined twenty-five dollars for having a son that did not know any better than blow full-blast on a pucco-molo. So Father got some glue and an old pair of pants and rolled the pants into a ball and glued them in the horn part of the pucco-molo. It does not make so much noise now.”

“But can it play a tune?” I asked Jibby.

“Terribly,” said Jibby, and we let it go at that. We talked it over and decided to ask Professor Slocum if we could have a band, and Jibby said he would try to get the General Organization—which is the whole High School—to put enough money in the budget to support a band.

The first thing, after Professor Slocum had said we might have a High School Band if we wished, was that there was no money for it. The General Organization was willing enough, but all its money had been set aside for football and other things and there wasn’t any more. But that did not stop Jibby. He went around among the students of the High School and got

THE BAND

a lot of them to get together and organize the Music Union. The Music Union was to support the band and pay its expenses and buy its instruments. And it did. The only one it did not buy was the pucco-molo. It did not buy one because there was only one in America and Jibby Jones would not sell that one.

Well, the Riverbank High School Band got started. And right from the very first we had trouble. Right out of a blue sky, as you might say, lightning struck us. Professor Slocum, the Principal of our school, got a better job somewhere and Professor Claggs came from somewhere to be our Principal. He was all right, I guess, in a lot of ways, but if there was anything in the world he thought he was especially good at it was band music. Not that he could play a note; not a bit of it! But he thought he was the only man in the world that knew the kind of music a band should play. He was a music high-brow, I guess. Anyway, the kinds he wanted us to play were so difficult that they would have made Sousa's band tremble and gasp. And we were so poor at playing, not having been at it long, that when we played "Tipperary," people would say, "They're trying to play 'Rock of Ages'—or maybe it is the 'Star-Spangled Banner'—can you make out which?"

And the worst was that Professor Claggs got sort of uppish about it and insisted that he was to be the one and only boss of the band. And he had us there, too. He could be. You see, he couldn't boss the General Organization because it had a Constitution and By-Laws that told just how it should be governed and

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

that it was to be governed by the vote of the whole school. And he could not boss the Lit. or the Drama League because they had Constitutions, too, which told how they should be governed. But the Music Union had been sort of hurried up and thrown together, the way Russia was in the days of long ago—almost—and it had no Constitution or By-Laws or anything. So in stepped Professor Claggs like a Czar of Russia and said he was going to rule and that his word was law.

Well, nobody likes to be ruled that way, by a despot. We tried to toot and thump out the tunes Professor Claggs chose, but even our instructor—Professor Minch—threw up his hands and said it could not be done. He actually wept. Musicians who are awfully fond of music do that, sometimes. They can stand a lot of awful noise if it is necessary and useful, but when it is unnecessary and useless they weep and tear their hair, and that was what nice old Professor Minch did. He had hoped to train us to play “Over There” and “Tipperary” and a few things of that sort by the time the State Band Concert came along, but when he had to try to get a bunch of raw kids—some of whom hardly knew one end of a cornet from the other—to play some terribly hard thing like “Pittijowsky’s Sad Wail in K. Minor,” old Professor Minch just threw his hands up to his hair and let the tears run down his poor old leathery cheeks.

“It’s no use!” he said. “It cannot be done. We must learn to fly before we soar to the high heavens. I give up! I quit!”

THE BAND

We all quit. Although I was nothing but official water-carrier and librarian, I could see that it was no use. Professor Minch had told us that it was impossible to hope to win any prize in the State Band Contest, which was in the Spring, by trying to play fancy pieces.

"But we may win a small prize and recognition," he said, "by making use of what we have. We will work hard, and when the State Contest comes we will be surprising and amusing. We will play 'Over There' as well as we can, and in the chorus part we will introduce the pucco-molo. When we come to the 'over there,' Jibby Jones will play heavy and loud—'boomp-a-boomp'—on the pucco-molo. It will surprise and amuse. It will be like a giant bull bellowing. It will astonish!"

Well, that was all over and done with. We couldn't work any specialties like that into "Pittikowsky's Sad Wail in K. Minor." So we went to Professor Claggs and told him we guessed we would not have a band, and Professor Minch told him why.

By that time, I guess, Professor Claggs—who had come from a small High School—had made up his mind that he would have about all one man needed to do in just being Principal and without trying to run the Music Union. He was nice about it. He said he saw now that he had made a mistake, and that he would not boss us any more. We could run the affairs of the Music Union and the Band ourselves, he said, because it was really our affair since we raised our own money, and so on. So we were rid of our Czar. We were like a republic—like the United States. We

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

could govern ourselves and not be ruled by a Czar, and that suited us fine. It was what we wanted; what everybody wants.

We met then and elected Professor Minch to be Director of the Riverbank High School Band, and we elected a Program Committee, which was really a committee to decide what tunes we should learn to play. So everything was all right again, and we went to work hard, to make up for lost time. Jibby stuck an old coat and vest in the pucco-molo, to keep the pants company and quiet its noise a little more, and good old Professor Minch was happy again. He said that if we stuck to simple pieces we might do well enough to win, maybe, a fourth or fifth prize next spring, and that would be something, anyway.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STUFFED ALLIGATOR

WELL, we felt that getting that band going was another feather in the cap of The Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley, and we were proud of it. We had a stable out back of our house and now that my father had sold his horses and had an automobile he let me use the old harness room, and we made that the Town Club of the Young Alligator Hunters. We had our alligator flag there, and our books, and we met there on rainy afternoons to do our home-work, and sometimes in the evenings, and whenever we ran across a picture of alligators or crocodiles we stuck it on the wall, and that was what made Skippy Root remember the stuffed alligator that Mr. Beemus used to have.

Mr. Beemus was an old man who used to live on our street, and one time he went to Florida and he shot a big alligator there and was so proud of it he had it stuffed, and it used to hang in his office downtown, but when he quit business and went to live in California he sold all his things to Moses Shuder, the junkman, and for a long time the stuffed alligator used to be in Moses Shuder's window. Then Moses Shuder put second-hand stoves in his window, and the stuffed alligator lay around his shop a while, and then I didn't know where it went. So we thought, if he had it, we

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

would buy it, if it didn't cost too much, and hang it up in our Club in our stable.

We all went down to Moses Shuder's one day to ask him about it, but it was just a couple of days before Halloween, and he wouldn't talk to us. He said the alligator was in his sheds somewhere and he wouldn't bother to hunt it up, and we had better get out of there mighty quick or he would call the police, and that he knew what we were snooping around for. Then he picked up a piece of lead pipe, so we got away from there. Even Jibby Jones knew why Shuder was so riled up.

Ever since Fourth of July we boys had been bragging to Jibby Jones what a bully time we always had on Halloween and how we always went out in a gang and did about a thousand things. We bragged that the police never bothered the big kids when they took gates and hung them up in trees and did all that sort of thing, but most of all we bragged about what the big fellows did to Moses Shuder's junk wagon.

Of course Wampus and Tad Willing and Skippy Root and I never did anything to Moses Shuder's junk wagon because we were not old enough yet, but we expected we would when we were bigger. What we kids did on Halloween was to go out and tic-tac on windows and throw corn against them and ring doorbells, and things like that, but the most fun was seeing where Moses Shuder's junk wagon would be on the morning after Halloween.

Everybody in town began guessing about a week before Halloween where the junk wagon would be, and

THE STUFFED ALLIGATOR

it was always somewhere no one had guessed. One year it was in the top of the big cottonwood tree in the High School yard and the next year nobody found it for two days because it was on top of the Mayor's desk in the City Hall. Another time it was up in the Episcopal Church bell-tower. Another year it was on top of the pilot-house of the *Mary Bell* ferryboat. Another time a gang carried Miss Moss's chicken-coop and set it in the middle of the park and when folks went to look at it the junk wagon was in the chicken-coop.

I guess Moses Shuder got used to having his junk wagon do stunts. In some towns the police just say, "No Halloween tricks!" and there are none, but in Riverbank they never said it because folks said, "Boys will be boys; let them have their fun"; and the Mayor thought the same thing. Mr. Rankin was Mayor.

Well, about two weeks before this Halloween the men met to say who should be voted for for Mayor in November. Mr. Rankin was nominated again, but the other side nominated Mr. Pardee, and when he was nominated he got up and made a speech and said it was a shame the way Riverbank had been run by Mr. Rankin. He said that if he was elected there would be law and order and a police force that would be worth while and no more Halloween. Especially no more fooling with Moses Shuder's junk wagon. He said Mr. Rankin was a mighty poor Mayor, because he did not dare tell the Mud Creek Gang to leave the junk wagon alone.

When Mr. Rankin heard that, he wrote a piece for

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

the paper and said he was for law and order ten times as much as Mr. Pardee ever dared to be, and that he was no more afraid of the Mud Creek Gang than a cat is of milk. And just to prove it, he said, he wouldn't let anybody touch Moses Shuder's junk wagon. He said he would swear in fifty special policemen and any Mud Creek gangster that touched the junk wagon would be arrested and put in jail.

Well, that made us feel pretty sick, after the way we had bragged to Jibby Jones, and even my father and the other fathers said Halloween would not be Halloween if nothing happened to the junk wagon.

"Smale," my father said to Wampus's father, "if nothing happens to that junk wagon this year, it will be the first time for thirty years. It's a shame! Carrying off that junk wagon has come to be a Riverbank tradition. Do you remember the first time, thirty years ago, when we——"

"Hold on there! Go easy!" Mr. Smale said. "You don't mean 'we,' do you?"

"All right; I won't say 'we,' Smale," my father laughed. "But you remember what certain young rascals did with it, don't you?"

When our fathers felt sorry because the junk wagon fun had to stop, you can bet we felt ten times sorrier, for we had told Jibby Jones how everybody in town hurried out the morning after Halloween to see in what crazy place the junk wagon had been put that time, and how the paper always had about half a page telling about it.

"Of course, you don't feel the way we do about it,"

THE STUFFED ALLIGATOR

we told Jibby, "because you're just a stranger here and we were born here."

"No," Jibby said, "I feel worse."

"Worse?" Wampus cried. "I bet you don't! Why do you?"

"Well," Jibby said, "you know my nose, don't you?"

Of course we knew his nose.

"What has your nose got to do with Moses Shuder's junk wagon?" Wampus asked.

"Well, it's a sight worth seeing," Jibby said in his solemn way. "Lots of people have said so. If you like noses, my nose is worth coming miles to see, and just think how disappointed folks would be if they had heard about my nose and longed to see it and then, when they met me, I didn't have any nose. They would be broken-hearted."

He meant it, too. He was proud of his nose because it was like one his great-great-grandfather had—one that George Washington noticed and spoke about.

"If I lost my nose—if it blew off, or something," Jibby said, "I would be sorry, but I would be glad, too. It is a nuisance sometimes when the wind blows and it flaps and flutters. And there's such a lot of it for the mosquitoes to bite. And it is a bother when I want to push through a tangle of trees and vines—it is always catching on things, like a fishpole. And sometimes folks laugh at it. And, so, if I lost it there would be compensations. I would have the memory of it and I could think what a fine nose it was while it lasted and I could brag about how it looked when I had it. But a stranger that came to see it and did not see it would be

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

just plain disappointed. And that's how I feel about Moses Shuder's junk wagon. You had it, and you saw it, but I never did see it. So I'll feel worse than you do."

"Shucks!" Wampus said.

"Well, how would you like to go all the way to Egypt to see the pyramids and find they were gone?" Jibby asked. "Suppose, all my life I had heard of the Rose Festival at Pasadena and when I went to Pasadena they stopped having it? If I go away from here people by thousands may say to me, 'Riverbank? That's where they do stunts with Moses Shuder's junk wagon on Halloween, isn't it? Did you see it?'—and I'll have to look sick and say, 'No; they stopped doing stunts with it the year I was there.'"

We saw what he meant then.

"If it's going to break your heart like that," Wampus said, "why don't *you* fight those fifty special policemen and hang the junk wagon on the moon or somewhere, yourself?"

"Maybe I'll have to," Jibby said without a smile. "I hate to have an interesting custom stop just when I come to a town."

"You don't mean you could get the junk wagon away from fifty policemen and the Mayor and the City Council, do you?" I asked. "How would you do it? What makes you think you could do it?"

"Well, January for one thing," Jibby said. "And Fourth of July. And Easter."

That was all he would say then. It sounded like

THE STUFFED ALLIGATOR

nonsense to us, but we discovered soon enough what he meant. The next day he said to us:

"I've been thinking about that junk wagon and I can't handle it alone. The Young Alligator Hunters will have to help me. And there's one thing I'll have to leave to you."

"Fighting those fifty policemen, I guess," Wampus said.

"No, I can take care of them, I think," Jibby said as calm as an oyster. "You'll have to think of the place to put the junk wagon, because I don't know all the places it has been."

We thought that was easy, so we began thinking then and there, but it wasn't so easy, after all—it had been almost everywhere.

"Then I'll have to think of a place," Jibby said, when we had thought and thought. "I guess I can think of one if I try. You can help some other way."

Well, our newspaper is published in the evening, and when I saw it that night I went right to the telephone and called up Jibby.

"Did you see the article in the paper, Jib?" I asked him. "It settles your junk wagon business, I guess."

"Do you mean the one headed 'Rowdies Defy the Mayor'?" Jibby asked me. "The one that is about a letter the Mayor has received? If you do, George, I have read it, and I was just going to call you up and tell you to read it, because it makes everything so much easier for us."

Well, that beat anything I ever heard! I had thought the article would make the Mayor and the

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

Chief of Police and their fifty special policemen so mad that nobody would have a quarter of a millionth of a chance to do anything with the junk wagon. The letter to the Mayor was printed in full and it was signed "Mud Creek Rattlers," which was the name the Mud Creek toughs went by. It said the Rattlers did not care a pin for the Mayor or his policemen and that they were going to do what they pleased with Moses Shuder's junk wagon. They defied the Mayor to stop them, and said all the Mayor needed to do was to find the wagon on the day after Halloween—if he could.

The rest of the article told what the Mayor said about the letter, and what Mr. Pardee said about it, and the editor said it would be interesting to guess where the junk wagon would be found—in Moses Shuder's junk yard or in another place. On another page the editor had an article headed "Where will the Junk Wagon Be Found?" and he said that evidently Mr. Rankin's way of being Mayor made the toughs think they could do what they pleased in Riverbank. The editor was for Mr. Pardee for Mayor, I guess, but we were all for Mr. Rankin. Mr. Rankin wasn't such a dried-up little bean as Mr. Pardee was.

So Jibby told me to come over to his house, and when I got there the rest of the boys were there and so was Piffy Rankin, Mr. Rankin's son. Piffy had never been in our crowd and he acted shy, so the first thing Jibby Jones did was to hook Piffy on to the rest of us.

"The name of this organization," Jibby told him, "is the Young Alligator Hunters, and what we are

THE STUFFED ALLIGATOR

hunting now is a stuffed alligator.

"We can't make you a Full Member, Piffy, but we will make you an Associate Member, if you promise to keep everything secret."

Piffy said he would, so Jibby said the second object of the organization was to keep up the Moses Shuder junk wagon custom in Riverbank, and he asked us if any of us had thought of a new place to put the junk wagon on Halloween. None of us had.

"Well, I have," Jibby said. "So the next thing is to think how to get the junk wagon there."

"Is that all!" Wampus hooted. "That's easy, isn't it? All we have to do is go down and chase fifty special policemen away and lift the junk wagon over an eight-foot board fence! That's an easy thing to think! I'll say it is easier to think than to do."

"Maybe it is," Jibby said, "but my father always says the only way to do a thing is to do it. And he says you can't do a thing until you know *how* you are going to do it. And he says you can't know how until you think about it. That junk wagon won't come out of the junk yard by itself, and we don't know how to get it out, so we'll have to *think* it out."

"Sure! Sure!" Wampus hooted. "And I suppose the way to think it out of the junk yard is to think about January, like you said! Oh, slush!"

"I only said January because it is part of the calendar, just as Halloween is," said Jibby gently. "It just seemed to me that if people did not like Halloween tricks, and wanted to stop them, Halloween would be like January. Every year still has a January in it and

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

nobody complains about it being there, but—do you know how January got its name?"

"No," Wampus said.

"It was named for Janus, one of the gods the old Romans worshiped. He was the god of the Beginnings of Things, so they named the beginning of the year for him. They had a Feast of Janus, and it was all pagan. The old Romans are all dead now and Janus is played out as a god, but we've still got January. People wouldn't stand for a Feast of Janus and all that pagan stuff now, so January has been reformed, but we still have it. And then there is Easter. Easter used to be a pagan festival long before there were any Christians; it celebrated the coming of spring. Of course, the Christians couldn't have a festival like that—a pagan one—any more than Mr. Pardee can have an old-style Riverbank Halloween if he gets to be Mayor. So the Christians changed Easter; they made it a church festival. They reformed it, but they kept it."

"Well, what of it?" Wampus asked.

"I only thought," said Jibby mildly, "that maybe the Young Alligator Hunters would have to keep the junk wagon stunt, but keep it a new way. If folks could change January from the Month of the Two-Faced Janus into a Happy New Year Month, and keep it, we ought to think how to change Halloween and keep it."

"Fine!" I said. "Only, you do the thinking, Jibby!"

Well, Jibby was sitting on his bed and he wrapped

THE STUFFED ALLIGATOR

his long arms around his knees and pointed his nose at the ceiling and thought out loud.

"Feast of Janus—New Year's Day!" he said. "Folks couldn't keep the Feast of Janus so they kept the first day of the year—because it *was* the first day of the year—and they made it Happy New Year. So it matters what the day is. What day is Halloween?"

"It comes on October 31st, always," Skippy Root said.

"Why does it?" Jibby asked, but none of us knew.

"Because November 1st is always All Saints' Day, and Halloween is the night before that," said Jibby. "And All Saints' Day used to be called All Hallows' Day in Old England. Hallowed meant holy or saintly. And 'e'en' is short for evening. So All Hallows' E'en—and that's the right name for it—meant the day before All Saints' Day, and 'Halloween' is the short for it."

"Well, where does that get us?" Wampus asked.

"I don't know," Jibby said. "It ought to get us somewhere, because it is a start, and a start always has an end-up."

He thought a while and then he said:

"It's peculiar, isn't it, that kids and big fellows should go out on the night before All Saints' Day and steal gates and junk wagons and do mischief? Do you know why?"

We did not know.

"In the old days," Jibby said, "folks used to be superstitious and believe in strange things—ghosts and fairies and goblins. Before they were Christians they

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

were pagans and for a long time they got what the pagans used to believe mixed with the new Christian beliefs. They used to believe that on Christmas Eve the horses and cattle could talk like human beings—things like that. Whenever there was a special church day, they figured the day before must be a special day, too, exactly the way boys begin shooting firecrackers the 3d of July. So they thought the night before All Saints' Day must be special in some way, and they decided it was the one night on which the elves and fairies and goblins were given a holiday and allowed to play around. The rest of the year the elves and fairies and goblins had to keep hidden, but on this one night they could come out and have a grand old time."

"Yes, I read that somewhere," Tad Willing said. "The ignorant peasants believed that Puck and the rest of the fairies came out on Halloween and upset the milk pails and threw down the pasture bars and let the cattle go astray and did all sort of tricks."

"And all those things did happen on Halloween," Jibby said. "The only trouble was that there were no real fairies or elves or goblins to do them. So the young folks who liked to do mischief did them. They went out and upset the milk pails and let down the pasture bars and pulled the cabbages up by the roots and threw them at doors. They were helping the bad fairies, and that's how Halloween rough-house stunts started. So, you see, the junk wagon stunt is just the sort of thing young fellows did back in the time of King Alfred when they were playing they were bad

THE STUFFED ALLIGATOR

fairies. So Halloween has always been the bad fairies' night, and that's why most folks don't like it."

"Well, where does that get us?" Wampus asked.

"I don't know," Jibby had to admit, "but all the fairies were not bad. Puck was mischievous, but there were plenty of good fairies. If Halloween came and Puck let out the cattle to go astray, a good fairy would sometimes drive the cattle back and put up the bars. If Puck soured the milk, a good fairy would sweeten it again. If a farmer went to bed on Halloween and everything was all right in the morning, he thought the bad fairies had played the mischief, but that the good fairies had fixed everything all right again. Say!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE JUNK WAGON

JIBBY said "Say!" so suddenly that we all jumped.

"Good fairies!" he exclaimed. "That's the idea! That's how to keep up the Riverbank Halloween junk wagon stunt! I've got it! The Young Alligator Hunters will be the Halloween good fairies!"

Well, it did not sound very exciting, but it turned out to be. When Jibby said it we thought he meant we would stay at home and twiddle our thumbs, maybe, but we should have known Jibby better than that. All the time he was thinking junk wagon and how to get it away from the fifty policemen and put it in some crazy place and keep up the stunt.

That night we Young Alligator Hunters planned the whole thing, but Jibby did most of the planning, and the first thing he did to start the stunt was to go over to my house and see my mother. He was gone half an hour and when he came back he said:

"That part is all right; the junk wagon will be in a place it has never been before."

"What place is that?" we asked him.

"Sunday School," Jibby said. "The junk wagon has never been in a Sunday School, has it? It seems to me it ought to do a tough old junk wagon good to go to Sunday School once in a while."

"Which Sunday School is it going to?" we asked.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"Green Street Sunday School," Jibby said, and I knew then that somehow or other Jibby would get that junk wagon out of Moses Shuder's junk yard and into the Sunday School. He could do it if any one could.

The Green Street Sunday School was the one I went to. It is the biggest in town and it is a building by itself—a good big one—next door to the Green Street Church. We saw then how slick Jibby's thinking was when he really got his thinker to working. There couldn't be any queerer place for an old junk wagon to be than in a Sunday School, and there couldn't be any handier queer place than the Green Street Sunday School, because there was nothing between it and Moses Shuder's junk yard but Mr. Cadderman's factory. First came Moses Shuder's junk yard on the corner, with the tall board fence around three sides—fence on Green Street, fence on Elm Street, and fence on the alley. Next came Mr. Cadderman's factory, a big brick building that went all the way from Green Street back to the alley. Next came the church property, with the Sunday School building in the side yard nearest to Mr. Cadderman's factory.

Moses Shuder's office was a one-story building, fronting on Green Street and built close up against Mr. Cadderman's factory wall, inside the junk yard. Back of his office were sheds, backed up against the wall of Mr. Cadderman's factory, but open-faced toward the junk yard. He kept old iron in one shed and old rags in another and old paper in another, and

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

one he used for sorting things. Back by the alley was another shed with doors, and that was where Moses Shuder kept his old white horse. The junk wagon usually stood out in the junk yard near this horse shed, and all the rest of the junk yard was piles of all kinds of junk and litter—an awful muss.

The junk wagon was a genuine old junk wagon if ever there was one. It was a regular four-wheeled wagon with a seat in front and shafts for the horse and it hadn't seen paint since the year One. Back of the seat, on either side, uprights were nailed and from the top of one to the top of the other a strap was nailed and to the strap were fixed six cowbells that jangled as old Moses drove up and down yelling "Ra-hags! Bolluls! Ra-hags! Bolluls!" To see an old junk wagon like that in a Sunday School certainly would be a joke—if we could get it there. The only trouble was that there would be fifty policemen watching it every minute. But Jibby did not let a little thing like that worry him!

For the whole week before Halloween the newspaper kept on printing "Where Will The Junk Wagon Be?" articles. It asked "Can Mayor Rankin Prevent The Tough Element From Taking The Junk Wagon?" Then all the papers in Iowa, and even the Chicago papers, began having articles about the junk wagon. Everybody in town was excited about it. The Mayor said in the paper: "I stake my reputation on the junk wagon. I promise the people of Riverbank that the Mud Creek Rattlers shall not touch the

THE JUNK WAGON

junk wagon. If they do, I do not ask to be elected Mayor of Riverbank again."

That was after Jibby and Piffy Rankin went to see him. They had a long talk with him, and when Jibby had explained about the Young Alligator Hunters the Mayor laughed and said he was with us. Then Jibby went to see Mr. Cadderman and I went with him. Jibby had thought of that, too.

Mr. Cadderman is a fat man and jolly and he was Alderman from the Third Ward and a friend of Mr. Rankin and wanted to see Mr. Rankin elected again, and he was also the Chairman of the Committee to help the starving Armenians. His factory was three stories high and it was a plow and wagon factory. Jibby had thought of all that.

When Jibby had told Mr. Cadderman what we wanted, he laughed harder and longer than the Mayor had laughed, because he was more of a laugher.

"I'm with you, boys," he said, "but why don't you have a water curtain, too?"

"A water curtain?" we asked, because we did not know what he meant, but when he explained I giggled like a girl. Even Jibby grinned. So that was settled, and then we went next door and saw Moses Shuder.

It was pretty hard to explain to Moses Shuder what the Young Alligator Hunters were, because he was deafish and a little bit thick-headed, anyway, but when we got it through his head he grinned and said "Fine! Fine!" So that was all right, and everything was fixed.

Halloween was Wednesday. All Wednesday morn-

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

ing Moses Shuder drove his junk wagon up one street and down another with the bells jangling while he shouted "Ra-hags! Bolluls! Ra-hags! Bolluls!"—but at noon he drove the wagon into his junk yard and unhitched the horse and the Chief of Police and four policemen locked and barred the two gates and unrolled a coil of barbed wire and fastened it along the top of the fence. They backed the junk wagon into the space between Moses Shuder's office and the first shed, against the wall of Mr. Cadderman's factory.

About three o'clock in the afternoon a lot of boys hurried all over town scattering handbills that said "Vote for Pardee! End the Halloween nuisance! Protect junk wagons and all other property." They scattered thousands of them. We heard about it the next day, but not that afternoon because we were doing something else. At three o'clock we were mighty busy.

It was like this: Just after noon, or between then and one o'clock, the Chief of Police marched his fifty special policemen from the City Hall and stationed them outside the junk yard. Each man had a good-sized club and maybe they had pistols—I don't know. After that no one was allowed nearer the junk yard than the middle of the street. Then, about two o'clock, two of the hose companies came with their hose reels and hitched their hose on to the hydrants and laid the hose close along the outside of the junk yard fence. That was the water curtain Mr. Cadder-

THE JUNK WAGON

man meant. But we Young Alligator Hunters did not see any of that.

When I had had my lunch at noon, Jibby came for me, and as we were leaving my house my mother stopped Jibby.

"I just wanted to tell you," she said to him, "that everything is ready for the junk wagon in the Sunday School. The janitor will be there whenever you need him, and to-morrow the girls will decorate the wagon if you boys do get it."

"We'll get it," Jibby said. "Are the handbills printed?"

"Yes. The white ones came yesterday and the pink ones this afternoon," my mother said. "I do hope everything goes off all right."

"It will," Jibby said.

Well, we went down to Mr. Cadderman's factory. We went one at a time and went inside until we were all there—Jibby and Wampus and Skippy Root and Tad Willing and Piffy Rankin and I—and Mr. Cadderman, laughing so he could hardly speak, let us down into his cellar and left us there. We began to dig.

The cellar wall was built of limestone rocks and we pried out three or four and took turns digging the dirt, making a tunnel that went out and up, under the junk yard. It was not much work. The soil was not too hard and we did not have far to go. In less than an hour Tad, who was digging then, backed out of the tunnel and said he had dug through. Jibby wiggled up the tunnel and took a look.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

The tunnel had come out into the shed that had the paper junk in it—bales of loose paper, piles of paper not baled yet, and bundles of old newspapers and magazines by the hundred—and from behind the bales and bundles we could peek out into the junk yard. We all took peeks at it and then we backed down into the cellar again and waited.

That was about four o'clock, and we sat around in the cellar and talked. About six o'clock Mr. Cadder-man came down with sandwiches and helped us eat them, and when it was dark outside the six of us Young Alligator Hunters wiggled up through our tunnel and sat down behind the paper bales and did some more waiting.

That was a long wait. We could not talk; there was nothing to do but sit and wait. One hour went by and then another hour and another. Outside the junk yard we could hear the special policemen talking to each other and the Chief telling the firemen to turn on the water the minute he yelled "Wat!"

At eleven o'clock we heard the Chief say, "Ready now! Here they come!"—and then about a hundred Mud Creek Rattlers shouting and yelling as they charged for the junk yard, and the Chief shouted "Wat!" The water began to spit and pop out of the hose nozzles and the fifty policemen charged at the Mud Creek fellows with their clubs. For ten minutes there was a grand fight, I guess, but we had no time to look. Neither did the police have time to climb up and look over the tall fence—they had their hands

THE JUNK WAGON

full, and that was just how Jibby had figured it would be.

We hurried out of the paper shed and over to where the junk wagon was and, when we looked up, there was a rope with stout iron hook sliding and creeping down the side of the brick wall of the factory. Jibby reached up and grabbed the hook and hooked it under the rear axle-tree of the junk wagon and gave two stiff pulls on the rope and up the side of the factory wall the old junk wagon went as slick as a whistle! We watched until it disappeared over the top of the factory, and then we slid for the tunnel. Jibby was the last one through, and as he went in he pulled a bundle of papers over the mouth of the hole and that part of the job was complete.

The Mud Creek gang had come down Elm Street, and it was up Elm Street the police chased them, the water from the nozzles tumbling the Mud Creekers head over heels and the police lighting into them with their clubs. I guess those toughs got enough to do them for a year or two. Then the Chief of Police, just to make sure, looked over the fence and—the junk wagon was gone! I guess he did raise a row then! When the police came back, they hunted through the sheds of the junk yard, but there was no junk wagon.

Long before that, you can bet, Mr. Cadderman's men had lowered the junk wagon into the Sunday School yard and we were out through a cellar window on that side and helping the janitor roll the wagon through the double doors into the Sunday School. The janitor locked the door and we Young Alligator

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

Hunters went home like good little boys. Our work was done for that night, and Jibby was pleased—we had snaked the junk wagon away from the police and the Mud Creekers, had hiked it up one side of a three-story building, across the roof, and down the other side, and rushed it into a Sunday School. That was all.

The police spent the rest of the night hunting that junk wagon. They looked high and low and scurried all over town, but never found a trace of it and early next morning—the morning of All Saints' Day—the Chief of Police was so angry he had the Mayor call the City Council together and offer one hundred dollars reward to whoever could discover the junk wagon. The Mayor begged the Council not to do it, and Mr. Cadderman voted "No!"—but the Council voted the reward. The Riverbank newspaper came out with an extra, telling all about it. Everybody was terribly excited.

Well, about noon the Young Alligator Hunters—the six of us—started out with the handbills my mother had had printed—the white ones. They said, "Where Is THE JUNK WAGON If you want to know, look for the pink handbills. Watch! Wait! Look!"

My! People were so interested that they nearly tore the clothes off us. They jumped for any piece of pink paper they saw in the street. Not in the whole thirty years had Riverbank been as interested in the junk wagon as it was that day. And at five o'clock,

THE JUNK WAGON

or maybe a few minutes earlier, we started out with the pink handbills.

Grab them? Did people grab them? Oh, boy!

Well, by eight o'clock that evening the Green Street Sunday School building was packed and jammed, and every person in it had paid twenty-five cents to get in. Because this was what the pink handbill had said:

AT EIGHT O'CLOCK TO-NIGHT, THE GREEN
STREET SUNDAY SCHOOL

The High Chief Wagon Chaser of the Young Alligator Hunters will Announce the Location of the Moses Shuder Junk Wagon. Come One, Come All. Admission, 25 cents.

NOTICE—The first person to touch the junk wagon after the Announcement will receive the One Hundred Dollars Reward offered by the City of Riverbank.

The Mayor was there and the Chief of Police and Mr. Cadderman and—you bet—the fifty special policemen who wanted to know how that junk wagon ever got away from them. Everybody was there and, at the far end of the room, hung the white curtain to show motion pictures on. At exactly five minutes after eight, the room went black and a big spotlight glared on the white curtain. Everybody expected to see an announcement thrown on the curtain, but, instead, Mayor Rankin stepped into the light. He began at the beginning and told about the Young Alligator Hunters and the good fairies and all that, just about as Jibby told us, and how we dug the tunnel and hiked the wagon over the plow factory.

"But where is the junk wagon?" somebody shouted.

At that Mayor Rankin snapped his fingers and the

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

white curtain rolled up and there was the junk wagon, with the spotlight on it! There was a yell you could hear half a mile and the people in the front row made a jump for the wagon because the first to touch it would get one hundred dollars reward, but do you think anybody could beat Jibby Jones? No, sir! Wampus Smale's little sister Sue jumped out of the shadow beside the old wagon and fairly hopped up and down as she patted the wagon and shouted, "I claim it! I touched it first! I claim the money for the Armenian babies!"

She got it, too. The Mayor gave her the money in new, crisp bills, and everybody yelled and cheered. It was the best junk wagon Halloween Riverbank had ever had, and when election day came Mayor Rankin was elected as easy as pie. A couple of days after that, the Chief of Police met Jibby and me when we were on our way to school.

"Hold on!" he said to Jibby. "I want to ask you one thing. I admit you beat the police and beat the Mud Creekers and beat Pardee and beat the whole town, but I'd just like to know how you got that junk wagon up one side of that factory and down the other without having all those cowbells on it give notice to one and all."

"Well, my father always says it is better to have a long nose than a long tongue," Jibby said, "because the tongue is an unruly member. So that was one of the first things I thought of. The bells couldn't jangle, because Moses Shuder took all their tongues out before your police went there."

THE JUNK WAGON

The Chief of Police grinned.

"All right!" he said. "There's just one other thing I want to ask you—are you going to be in town next Halloween? Because, if you are, I'll take you on my side and let the Mud Creekers have the fifty special police and we'll beat them to a frazzle."

"Yes," Jibby, "I guess we could. But it would spoil the fun."

"Well, come to think of it," the Chief said, "I guess maybe it would."

But here is another thing: A couple of days later Jibby said: "Well, boys, I think perhaps Moses Shuder does not feel so sour toward the Young Alligator Hunters now; suppose we go down and buy that stuffed alligator."

So we went down to Shuder's and he was not cross at all. He said he was glad to see us, and when we told him what we wanted he said he would not sell us the stuffed alligator—he would give it to us. He said he had found it in one of his sheds the day before Halloween. So we went out with him to the shed where it had been—and it was gone! Somebody had pried a board off the shed and had stolen the stuffed alligator.

CHAPTER XV

SEVERAL THINGS

WELL, as soon as Moses Shuder saw the stuffed alligator was gone, he was mad as hops and he turned on us and declared up and down that we had stolen it from him. He never did have much use for boys because they were always teasing him, or stealing metal from his yard to sell back to him, or shouting "Ra-hags! Bo-hottles!" at him to mock him, and he sure did get red-headed and yell at us.

He had an idea that we had made use of Halloween to sneak the stuffed alligator away from him and were coming back now to have a laugh at him, and he said we were thieves and cheats and a lot of other things, and ended by chasing us out of his place. Then he went to Mayor Rankin and wanted us arrested, but Mr. Rankin wouldn't do it—he said we were not the sort of boys that stole stuffed alligators or anything else. So Moses Shuder went to the Chief of Police.

The Chief was still a little sore because of the way we had snaked the junk wagon away from under his eyes, and I guess he would have arrested us in a minute if there had been any proof that we had stolen the stuffed alligator, but when he came and talked to us there were five of us to say we hadn't stolen it, and only Moses Shuder to say we had, and Moses had no

SEVERAL THINGS

proof, so all the Chief could do was growl and go away. But he said he would keep a mighty sharp eye on us.

We talked it over. Any way you looked at it, it was a mean thing to have even a junk man think you were thieves, and it was worse when the Chief of Police thought so, too, and we decided that the thing for us to do—if we could—was to find who had stolen the stuffed alligator, and prove we hadn't stolen it. And that was some job! The four of us—Tad and Skippy and Wampus and I—thought it would be easy, because a stuffed alligator six or twelve feet long isn't an easy thing to hide, and we thought that by keeping a sharp lookout for alligator hide we would be pretty sure to get a clue. The old thing had been pretty much busted, split open, and the stuffing coming out, and Moses Shuder had dumped rags and old metal and bottles on it, so it must have been a good deal of a wreck. There seemed to be only two things any one could want it for: somebody might want the hide to make an alligator-skin bag of, or some kids might have wanted it to hang up in a cave or a shed, about the same as we wanted it. We thought that if we kept an eye out for alligator bags and at the same time did some snooping and looked in all the caves and sheds where gangs of boys hung out, we would get a clue or find the alligator.

But Jibby Jones did not think so.

"I dare say, George," he said to me, "that we can find the stuffed alligator if we give all our time to it and persist faithfully, but I do not think it is going to

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

be an easy job. I am afraid we are not going to find that stuffed alligator until I have given it a great deal of thought. The trouble is that I have never heard of any one stealing a stuffed alligator, so I do not know just how to begin thinking about it."

"Begin at A, why don't you?" Wampus asked; "and then go on to B. And if that don't do any good, go on to C."

"I think perhaps I shall," Jibby said, solemnly, "but it may be very slow work."

But that's how he did go at the job. He bought a new ten-cent notebook and wrote "A" at the top of the first page, and under that he wrote "Abelstein," because Abelstein was the name of the family that was first in our Town Directory. Then under this he wrote "Frank C. Abelstein," and "Mrs. Frank C. Abelstein," and the names of all the Abelstein family. Then he wrote "No" after each name, because the Abelsteins are rich people and all the sons and daughters are full grown, and they would not steal a stuffed alligator that was coming unstuffed. So next Jibby wrote "Aborn," which was the next family in the Town Directory. He meant to go right on through the whole Directory, and when he came to any one who might have stolen the stuffed alligator he meant to investigate that person. It was a good idea, but it was going to take a lot of time, so we other boys did our detective work the other way. But we didn't get anywhere—the trouble was that we did not have enough spare time, I guess.

For one thing, the band was taking a lot of time.

SEVERAL THINGS

When Professor Minch found we were to be allowed to run the band as we chose, he kept us practicing every spare minute.

"You are very bad still," he told us. "You make noises like cats and dogs fighting, but better music will come if you work hard. Some day the Riverbank High School Band will be the best in the State. You will work hard and I will work hard, and we will see! Maybe we win that prize yet!"

Well, that was at the first practice after we had got rid of our Czar, and we all did the best we could, and when Professor Minch put down the little black stick he always beat time with his face was beaming. But all of a sudden he looked angry.

"Julky!" he almost shouted. "Julky! What are you doing?"

The boy he meant—John Julky—did not even look up. He had his cornet in his lap—the one the Musical Union had paid for and owned—and he was scratching on it with his knife-blade.

"I'm putting my name on this cornet," he said.

"Do not!" Professor Minch shouted, getting red in the face. "Stop it! You have no right; that cornet is not your cornet. It does not to you belong; it to the Music Union belongs. I will not the band instruments mutilated have!"

Julky did look up then, but he only gave Professor Minch an ugly stare.

"Forget it!" he said roughly, but he closed his knife and put it in his pocket.

For a minute Professor Minch looked as if he

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

wanted to say something pretty violent, but he held himself in.

"Attention!" he said, rapping on the music-rack with his little black baton. "I have forgotten to say this. I will say it now. Of the band instruments great care must be taken. They must not in any way harmed or injured be. They are loaned to us to use, but to the Music Union they belong. We are the band—yes!—but we do not own the instruments—no! Remember!"

Well, I hadn't scratched my name on the water pail, so that did not hurt me any. If the water pail belonged to the Music Union, I did not care; my job was to water the band when it was thirsty and I did not care who owned the pail. Or the tin dipper, either. So I thought the fuss was all over, but I didn't know John Julky as well as I got to know him. We knew him more than enough before we were through with him. From then on John Julky acted cross and sulky, and we all thought he was a nuisance. Professor Minch spent half our practice time trying to get John Julky to pay attention to the music and to play his part as it ought to be played, and we had to have twice as many practice meetings as we needed, and it all took time, and we got nowhere in our job of hunting the stealer of the stuffed alligator. And then Christmas came along, and that interfered, too. The first thing we knew, the Young Alligator Hunters were mixed up in the Sunday School trouble.

The first we heard of any trouble in the Sunday School was along about the first week in December,

SEVERAL THINGS

but we boys did not pay much attention to it, and we hadn't the slightest idea that Jibby Jones would get so worked up about it and do what he did.

Every Christmas there are doings at our Sunday School, and we always have them on Christmas Eve. There is always a tree, with presents for all of us, and the tree is all lit up with colored electric lights, and decorated until your eyes pop out, and there is always a Santa Claus with a cotton-batting beard and a red coat and cap, trimmed with cotton-batting. He comes in with a jingling of sleigh-bells and makes a funny speech, and then he takes the presents off the tree and calls out our names, and we go up and get our presents.

Mostly we boys don't have much to do with the Christmas doings except to be sure to go to Sunday School regularly for about a month beforehand, so as to be sure to be on the list. Sometimes one of the teachers ropes one of us in and makes us speak a piece. We try to get out of that if we can, but sometimes our mothers make us do it. But we never did have anything to do with getting up the doings—not until this year I'm telling you about. And we would not have had anything to do with it this time but for Reverend Bliss and the tenor and Jibby Jones. And, of course, old Mrs. Pethly.

Well, Wampus Smale has a sister Anna, and she sings soprano, which is the high notes when a quartette or anybody is singing. The rule is that there have to be four kinds of singers. There is the soprano, who has to sing high notes up to the topmost

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

squeak, and in our choir that was Anna Smale. Then there has to be a middling high lady singer, and she is the alto, and in our choir she was Miss Tully, who is nice and plump and smiling. Then there has to be a bass—only you call it “base” and not “bass” like a bass-fish—and in our choir that was Mr. Cuddeberry, the one the boys call “Flagpole,” because he is so tall and skinny. And the tenor is the sort of man-soprano who sings higher than he can, and in our choir the tenor was Reginald Percy Pitz, and he thought he was just about the whole choir and the whole church and the finest thing on earth. He certainly thought a whole lot of himself. It made us boys sick just to see the airs he put on.

So this day when Wampus and Tad and Skippy and Jibby and I were playing crokinole in the sitting-room at Smale’s, in came Anna Smale from choir practice, and she was hopping mad. She was just spitting sparks, she was so mad.

“Oh!” she cried, throwing her hat on the sofa. “Oh! I’m so angry that I could just get out of that choir and never go near it again! That Reginald Percy Pitz is simply insufferable! I never was so angry in my life. The way he spoke to dear good Mr. Bliss!”

So then she told her mother the whole business. As near as I could understand it, what had happened was that Reverend Bliss had gone to choir practice to ask the choir about what they would sing at the Christmas doings for the Sunday School, because he wanted them to sing Hymn Number 345 in the blue

SEVERAL THINGS

book. In the blue book that is "Hark, the herald angels sing."

"I don't care what else you sing," Reverend Bliss said in his nice, gentle way, "but I always like to have Hymn 345 sung at the Sunday School Christmas entertainment, because it was sung on the first Christmas I ever attended one, and my wife was a little girl then and sang it, and I like to hear it, always. It would be a great favor to me if you would sing Hymn 345."

Well, you don't know Reverend Bliss, but he is an old, old man and everybody loves him. He's the kind of gray-haired old man that everybody would like to have for a grandfather. If he came up to me the very day I got a new bicycle and said, "George, I'd like to have that bicycle to send to the heathen," I believe I would give it to him. He's the kind you would give anything to. He's just nice and friendly and fine, and that's all you can say about him.

So what did Reginald Percy Pitz do but stick his chin in the air and say the choir would not sing Number 345 in the blue book.

"I do not care to sing that hymn," he said, "and I have chosen the list of hymns already. I think we will consider the matter settled, and Hymn 345 will not be sung."

"I'm sorry," Reverend Bliss said, and Anna Smale said there were tears in his old eyes. "I'm sorry; I accepted your list of hymns and anthems for the church services, although they were not just what I should have chosen, and I thought perhaps you would

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

favor me in this small matter. It will be the first Sunday School Christmas affair I have had since I have been a minister where Hymn 345 has not been sung."

"The matter is settled," Reginald Percy said in a hard voice, and Reverend Bliss did not say any more. He went away. I guess he felt pretty bad about it, and Anna Smale said the choir had a big row, but that did not do any good—Reginald Percy had his way.

Now, while Anna Smale was telling all this to her mother, old Jibby Jones sat as straight as a pole beside the crokinole board and listened hard, and I could see his eyes glitter on both sides of that big nose of his. I guess he was getting a little mad himself; but all he said was:

"My father used to tell me that my grandfather used to say that his favorite Christmas Hymn was 'Hark, the herald angels sing.' I'm going to be disappointed if they don't sing it."

Then he said: "It's your shot, Wampus." And he went on to tell how crokinole reminded him of a game the natives of Madagascar used to play with chungas beans, only they play it on the smooth sand of the seashore, and one of their rules is that they have to flip the chungas beans with the big toe of the right foot. He said the natives called the game "chungachunga," which means "toe-toe," because the chungas beans look like dark brown toes, and "chungas" means "toe" in their language. He said he saw one native who was so expert that he could flip a chungas bean twenty feet with his big toe and knock his opponent's

SEVERAL THINGS

chunga bean clear and clean out of the ring.

Well, we got so interested that we forgot all about Reverend Bliss and Reginald Percy and Hymn 345, and the first thing we knew we had our shoes and stockings off and the crokinole board on the floor and were playing chung-a-chunga. Jibby Jones stood and watched us awhile, looking at our feet solemnly through his shell-rimmed spectacles, but we were not much good at it. We could not flip the crokinole rings worth a cent. We would double our big toes under and push them out at a crokinole ring and the ring would move about an inch.

"I don't believe it!" Wampus Smale said when he had tried about forty times. "I bet you were spoofing us, Jibby. A big toe hasn't any click in it; it can't shoot."

That seemed so to all of us, too.

"It must be that you are not doing it right," Jibby Jones said. "The natives of Madagascar, when I was there with my father when he was studying the Ikopa River, did it beautifully. They could flip a chung-a-bean farther with their big toes than you could flip one with your thumbs. So I know it can be done."

"You do it, then," Wampus dared him.

Jibby Jones watched us awhile. He looked at our toes and then he looked at his toes, and then he looked at his thumb.

"The big toe can't do it," he said then, as if he had settled that matter once and forever.

"Then how did the natives do it, if they were so smart?" Wampus asked.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"They could do it because they were smart," Jibby Jones said. "They could flip chungas beans with their big toes because they were smart enough to know that when a big toe can't do a thing alone it can do it if it calls in one of the smaller toes. How do you flip a bean with your thumb?"

"I just flip it, that's all," Wampus said.

"No, you don't!" Jibby said. "When you go to flip anything with your thumb you call in Mister First Finger and catch the end of your thumb behind it. Then, when you are ready to flip the bean you snap your thumb from behind your finger. Now, let's see if I can remember how the natives did it."

Jibby Jones drew in his big toe and edged it up to one of the crokinole rings and caught the end of his big toe under the toe next to it and—sure enough!—flip went the crokinole ring as slick as you please. In a minute we were all on to the trick. Wampus was the worst at it because his toe next to his big one was so short and chubby it would not wrap around as Jibby's long slim one did, and he could not snap as well, but Wampus had a better aim than I had or than Tad had, and that made up for it. In a few minutes we were so interested in the chungas-chungas game that you would have thought it was the only game in the world, and Jibby Jones was so good at it that we handicapped him; we made him shoot with his left foot.

CHAPTER XVI

CHUNGA-CHUNGA

BEFORE supper-time we were so excited over the chung-a-chung-a game that we had decided to organize ourselves into the Ikopa Chunga-Chunga Team and challenge any other team of chung-a-chung-a players in the world.

"What we want to do," Wampus said, for he was always thinking of how to make a profit, "is to invent a new sort of chung-a-chung-a board and a new sort of chung-a-chung-a bean, and patent them, because in a little while everybody will be playing chung-a-chung-a. That's how new games spread in this country. I bet that in a little while you won't be able to go into a house anywhere but you will find all the folks with their shoes and stockings off, and all of them from the baby to the grandfather playing chung-a-chung-a."

"That is quite possible," Jibby Jones said. "My father has a second cousin named Peter Crossly who is in the game manufacturing business in Toledo, Ohio. I'll write to him, if you wish, and ask him if he wants to buy a new game, and any money we get will be divided equally among us."

So that was agreed, and after supper we met again and played chung-a-chung-a and got up rules for it,

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

and planned out how the board ought to be made and what sort of chungu men we ought to have to shoot easiest with a big toe. Before the evening was over, Mr. Smale and Mrs. Smale and Anna were playing chungu-chungu too, and Jibby was so good at it that he could nudge his toe under a crokinole ring and flip it through the air and into a fruit basket at the other side of the room.

"I bet you'll be the champion chungu-chungu player of the world," Tad Willing told him.

"No," said Jibby Jones in his solemn way, "I do not think so. I may become the champion of the United States and Europe, but I do not think I can ever win the championship of the world away from the natives of Madagascar. They are only savages, but they have exceedingly prehensile toes."

"Did you say you saw this game in Madagascar?" Mrs. Smale asked.

"Yes, when I was there with my father," Jibby said.

"That's where old Mrs. Pethly's husband died," Mrs. Smale said. "He was a missionary to Madagascar and died there. It would not surprise me at all if she has seen the natives playing chungu-chungu. Poor old lady, we must go to see her soon and let her see us play chungu-chungu. She has been bedridden for two years now."

"She's a dear," Anna Smale said. "And do you know what she misses most, Mother? It is not hearing Reverend Bliss's sermons. She says that if she could hear him preach every Sunday she would not

CHUNGA-CHUNGA

mind being kept in her bed all the rest of the week."

"But—" said Jibby Jones, and then he stopped short. Nobody heard him but me, I guess, but I did and I saw the end of his nose twitch, the way it does when he has something in mind. You might call it "pointing," the way a pointer dog points. It is a sign that old Jibby Jones has thought of something worth thinking of. On the way home I asked him.

"Say, Jibby," I said, sort of joking, "I saw your old jib of a nose wiggle when Mrs. Smale was talking of Mrs. Pethly. What did you get a scent of?"

"A radio outfit," Jibby said.

"What do you mean by a radio outfit?" I asked him.

"I mean for Mrs. Pethly," Jibby said. "If Reverend Bliss had one and Mrs. Pethly had one, a sender in the pulpit and a receiver by her bed, she could hear his sermons—she could hear the whole service every time. I suppose a lot of people have thought of it—"

"No, they haven't," I said.

"Well, it's a thought, anyway," Jibby said, "and I'm going to think about it some more. If we can sell the chung-a-chung-a game to father's second cousin Peter Crossly, maybe we might spend some of the money for a radio set for Mrs. Pethly."

"I'm willing," I said, but Jibby Jones did not hear me. He was walking along as if he had seven-league boots on, and I could see he was thinking like a steam engine.

"Little toe helps big toe," he said to himself. "That's it— little toe helps big toe! What the big toe can't do alone the little toe can help it to do."

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"That sounds good, Jib," I said, "but what does it mean?"

"I was thinking of Hymn 345," Jibby said.

"Well, you're a quick thinker," I told him. "A second ago it was Mrs. Pethly, and then it was big toe and little toe, and now it is Hymn 345!"

"But it is all one thought," Jibby said, as if he was surprised that I could not see that as plain as day. "You can see that can't you?"

"Oh, yes! Sure! Of course! Certainly!" I jeered at him, and by then I was at my gate so I said good-night and left him.

Well, I understood it all well enough before Christmas Eve. We all did. Jibby Jones's father got a letter from his second cousin Peter Crossly saying it was too late in the season to do anything much with the chung-a-chunga game for the holiday trade that year, but that he would be glad to buy it and patent it for us, and that if we were willing he would do that and send us one thousand dollars now, as an advance payment on the royalties the game was sure to earn when it was put on the market.

"I thought," Jibby Jones drawled in his slow way when he told us about it, "that—as the Ikopa Chunga-Chunga Team is getting so much money now and will probably get so much more—we might take part of it and buy a radio outfit for Reverend Bliss and one for Mrs. Pethly. It would be fitting that some of the money we get from a game of the Madagascar heathen should be used for the widow of a Madagascar missionary and her minister."

CHUNGA-CHUNGA

We all thought so, too. Wampus asked if Reverend Bliss would want to have a radio, he not being exactly what you would call a boy.

"Well, it's the thing he wants most," said Jibby. "The Reverend Granby has a motion picture machine in his church and the church is crowded on Sunday nights, and Reverend Bliss has said more than once that he wished he could afford a good, loud-speaking radio receiving outfit for his church. Now he can have one."

So the Ikopa Chunga-Chunga Team voted to buy a radio set for Reverend Bliss, and we had Jibby's father write for it. He wrote to his second cousin, Peter Crossly, and when the outfit came it was a dandy.

"I bet Reverend Bliss will be the most surprised man in Riverbank when he gets this set Christmas Eve," Tad Willing said.

"Maybe," Jibby Jones said. "Maybe he will, but I don't think so. I think perhaps Reginald Percy Pitz will be."

Well, our Sunday School has a building of its own, alongside the church, and that is where we have Sunday School and the entertainments, and when it came along toward Christmas all the teachers were busy getting presents and putting up the tree and decorating it, and the choir was busy practicing the things it was going to sing, but not Hymn Number 345. Reginald Percy went around with his chin in the air, all swelled up because he thought he just about owned the church and was its boss, because

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

tenors are so hard to get that the Music Committee said, "My, my, we can't let Reginald Percy go! What would the choir do without him?"

So Christmas Eve came, and along about six o'clock Jibby and Wampus and Tad and Skippy Root and I went to the Sunday School, and we had Reverend Bliss's present with us. It mighty near took all of us to carry it, and when we went up front to where the sort of pulpit is, Mr. Brand—the Superintendent—met us and we said we had a present for Reverend Bliss, and he asked us what it was, and we said it was a radio, and that it was a present from the Ikopa Chunga-Chunga Team, and he was mighty tickled, because he likes Reverend Bliss the same as we all do. So he asked us if we wanted him to present it to Reverend Bliss when he was giving out the rest of the presents, because he was going to be Santa Claus that year.

"We thought maybe we would let it give itself to him," Jibby said. "We thought we would wire it up when we put it on the tree. We thought it would be amusing if it was on the tree and talked to Reverend Bliss itself. But when it does talk, you can take it off the tree and give it to Reverend Bliss, if you want to."

So Mr. Brand thought that was fine and dandy, because he is a good fellow and likes some fun once in a while. So we showed him how we had wrapped the big horn of the loud-speaker in thin tissue paper, so the words could come out clearly, and he climbed a ladder and hung it high up in the tree, near the top,

CHUNGA-CHUNGA

and ran the wire down the trunk of the tree, and under the carpet to the sort of pulpit.

"We'll just put the big box with the dials under the pulpit," Jibby said, "because I'll have to crowd into the pulpit myself, to set the dials at the right wave length."

So we did that. The pulpit was hollow inside and it was big enough to hold Jibby Jones and the box. Jibby was crowded a good deal, but he was willing to be. So that was all right; We fixed it with Mr. Brand to let Jibby into the Sunday School early that evening and to help him into the pulpit.

Wampus and Tad Willing went outside and unrolled the antenna they had already fixed and strung it from the gallery window of the Sunday School to the little window up in the church steeple, and brought the wire in and fixed it to the post of the receiving-box. Just then Reginald Percy came in. He did not pay any more attention to us boys than if we had not been there. He went over to the organ and pressed down a key and sang "la-la-la" and tried out his voice that way.

"I'm in good voice to-day," he said, puffing himself up. "I hope we have a large attendance of adults to-night; these whipper-snappers don't know good singing when they hear it."

We did not say anything.

"It must be quite a disappointment to the Riverbank Choral Union not to have you with them to-night, Mr. Pitz," Mr. Brand said, because this was the night the Choral Union, which is about one hun-

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

dred men and ladies, gave their Christmas Sing at the Opera House, and Reginald Percy thought the Choral Union was no good at all when he was not there.

"It is," he said. "I'm afraid my absence will sadly weaken the tenor parts, which are the most important. But what would you? A man cannot sing in two places at once. They must get along as best they can."

"They'll have to," said Mr. Brand, and he grinned, but not so that Reginald Percy could see him.

CHAPTER XVII

MUSIC IN THE AIR

AFTER supper the kids and grown folks began coming to the entertainment, and each Sunday School class sat together with its teacher, and the room was packed. Tad and I sat with our class, and our teacher—Miss Blythe—asked us where Jibby and Wampus and Skippy Root were, and we said we guessed they were somewhere. We did not say exactly where they were, because it would have sounded queer to say that Jibby Jones was up front, in under the pulpit. And we did not want to tell where Skippy and Wampus were, either, for they were at the other end of the air-line, at the sending station of the Riverbank "Eagle," getting ready to say what they had to say. The editor had said he would let us, because he is an extra good sport.

Well, Reverend Bliss began the entertainment with a short little talk—just a few words—and then he went down and sat in the front row to see and hear the rest of it.

"The first number on the programme," Superintendent Brand said, "will be a recitation by little Bessie Bliss, entitled, 'I Love Old Santa.' And before Bessie gives us her recitation I want to call your attention to the Christmas tree, so beautifully decorated by the ladies, and I want to ask all the little boys and

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

girls to sit quietly during the programme, because at the close old Santa Claus himself is going to appear, and he will have a present for every member of the Sunday School. Now, Bessie!"

So Bessie Bliss came up the aisle, all in white with a blue hairbow, and she stood by the pulpit and made a bow, and began her recitation. I guess Jibby, in the pulpit box, could not hear her and thought it was a good time to test the radio and see if it was working.

"I love dear old Santa Claus,
He is so good to me;
He brings me pretty presents,
And hangs them on the tree,"

Bessie Bliss recited in her thin little voice, and right in the middle of it something broke in and said in a loud voice:

"Hello! Hello! Can you hear me? Can you hear me?"

Everybody stood up and stared at the Christmas tree, because the voice seemed to be coming right out of it, and Bessie Bliss stopped short and looked at the tree. She did not know whether to go ahead with her piece or what.

"I'm up here in the tree," the voice said. "I'm a present for Reverend Bliss. I'm Reverend Bliss's present. Can you hear me? Hello! Hello! I'm Reverend Bliss's Christmas present. Here I am, up in the——"

Then Jibby lay off, I guess, for the voice stopped. Bessie Bliss looked one way and the other way, and Mr. Brand came hurrying to the platform and stood

MUSIC IN THE AIR

by the pulpit and rapped on it twice with his knuckles. He meant that Jibby was not to do anything, but Jibby must have thought he meant it was all right to go ahead, for the voice in the tree began again.

"I'm a present for Reverend Bliss," the present on the tree shouted. "This is me, done up in tissue paper. I'm here because we all love Reverend Bliss and wish him a Merry Christmas."

Mr. Brand looked up at the present and grinned.

"I think, Reverend Bliss," he said, "you have one of the most talkative presents that was ever hung on a Christmas tree." And all the people who were standing up and craning their necks to see the present laughed. "I'm going to ask the present not to talk just now," he added in a very loud voice. "I know it will not, for it is a very well-behaved present. When I rap twice on the pulpit, it will be still, and when I rap once, it will talk. I now rap once."

"Here I am, up here in the tree," sang out the present. "I'm a present for Reverend Bliss. Take me down!"

"Well, that was what Jibby had told Wampus and Skippy to radio right along, and they were doing it. But Mr. Brand rapped twice on the pulpit, and Jibby understood. He disconnected the loud-talker and hooked on the ear-phones and listened to Wampus and Skippy, and the present did not talk, and Bessie Bliss went on with her recitation. She was just a little tot, and it was easy to see she did not know exactly what to make of that talking present. She kept one eye on the tree all the time, and when she finished and

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

made her bow she did not bow to her audience—she bowed to the tree.

The next was a hymn by the choir, with everybody singing, and then some little girls recited together. The programme went along as well as programmes usually do, but I began to get nervous. Mr. Brand did not rap on the pulpit. When Emma Carter began her long recitation Mr. Brand hurried out, and I knew he was going to put on the Santa Claus suit. Then Mrs. Brand, his wife, got on to the platform and took charge and said that Santa Claus would be in in a minute, and that the choir would sing while we were waiting for Santa Claus. So the choir sang and in came Santa Claus, jingling his sleighbells.

He made a funny speech, and began to distribute the presents, calling off our names, and we went up when our names were called—first all the pupils and then the teachers, and then I saw him lean toward the pulpit and rap on it.

“—present for Reverend Bliss,” the present on the tree began, right in the middle of a sentence. “Right up here on the tree. Take me down. I’m for Reverend Bliss. I’m a present for Reverend Bliss, because we all love him. Take me down.”

Wampus and Skippy had been taking turns saying that into the sender all evening.

“Well, that present will not keep still!” said Santa Claus Brand, shaking his head. “I guess it will not be satisfied until we do take it down and give it to Reverend Bliss. George, the ladder, please!”

“I want to get down! I’m a present for Reverend

MUSIC IN THE AIR

Bliss. I'm on the tree," the present kept on saying while the janitor got the stepladder, and Santa Claus Brand talked at the same time, saying that certain boys of the Sunday School had bought this present for Reverend Bliss, and that it was a complete radio outfit, and one that could receive programmes so that all the Sunday School or all the church could hear them, and that it had a sender, too, so that Mrs. Pethly and any one that could not come to church could hear the sermons of Reverend Bliss right in their own homes, broadcast from the pulpit, and that the Riverbank "Eagle" had agreed to do it.

"My sakes!" he exclaimed, for he had to talk at the top of his voice, the present talked so loud. "My sakes, that present never will keep still until Reverend Bliss has it; I can see that!"

So he climbed the stepladder and took the present down, and Reverend Bliss stood up and came and got it. Everybody clapped their hands, they were so glad that Reverend Bliss had got what he wanted, and he placed the loud-talker on the pulpit and turned to speak to us, but for a minute he could not say anything. Mr. Brand made a great show of tearing the tissue paper off the big loud-talker—which had stopped talking—while Reverend Bliss blew his nose and wiped his eyes. Then Reverend Bliss spoke and thanked the boys who had given him the radio outfit, and I felt mighty proud. Then he went on and said how happy he had been all these years in our church and Sunday School, and so on, and he had to wipe his

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

eyes again and could not say any more. He went and sat down.

Well, I could see that Reginald Percy was just wiggling with impatience. He just hated to have anybody show up bigger than he did; he wanted to have his turn come again to stand up and sing and be important. So Mr. Brand said a few more words and then announced that the exercises would close with a hymn by the choir, and that everybody would please join in. Then he said:

"Hymn Number—" and hesitated.

He looked at Reginald Percy Pitz, but Reginald Percy had his chin in the air and that was all there was to it! But Mr. Brand made a last try. He walked over to Reginald Percy and asked him something, sort of pleading, but Reginald Percy just put his chin higher in the air and shook his head harder than ever. We knew what he was saying by that—he was saying that Hymn Number 345 was not going to be sung. So Mr. Brand came back to the edge of the platform.

"We will sing, in closing, Hymn Number—" he began again, but he turned quickly and looked at the loud-talker on the pulpit, for it had started talking again. And this time the voice was not the voice of Wampus or the voice of Skippy Root—it was the voice of Orlando P. Hutt, the leader of the Riverbank Choral Union. It came out of the loud-speaker clear and strong:

"We will now sing," it said, "the Christmas hymn that is the general favorite, and I ask every one who

MUSIC IN THE AIR

is listening to rise and sing with us. Let us put some spirit and vim into it. Ready, now!"

Well, I could just see Orlando P. Hutt, down there at the Opera House, turn from the audience to the Choral Union and rap twice with his baton. Mr. Brand turned and stared at the loud-speaker, and Reginald Percy lowered his hymn-book and scowled at the loud-speaker. And sure enough, out of the loud-speaker came the voices of—not our choir of four—but the one hundred voices of the Riverbank Choral Union and the whole audience of hundreds in the Opera House, singing "Hark! the herald angels sing," as loud and strong and joyfully as they could sing it! That good old Hymn Number 345 in the blue book was being sung, all right!

So everybody in our Sunday School stood up and joined in, and before they had sung three words, Anna Smale joined in, and then Miss Tully, the alto, joined in, and then Mr. Cudderberry, the bass, joined in. For half a second Reginald Percy Pitz scowled and looked mad, but he was beaten and he knew it. He stepped forward one step and raised his hand and began beating time and joined in and sang, "Hark, the herald angels sing," louder than anybody else.

Well, I guess that was enough triumph for one evening! Everybody crowded forward, after the hymn, and looked at the loud-speaker and congratulated Reverend Bliss and it was all fine and dandy, and the first thing I knew I was on my way home with my folks. It was not until half an hour or so after that

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

that I happened to think of Jibby Jones, and that we had left him under the pulpit.

"Pshaw!" I thought. "I need not worry about that; Mr. Brand would let him out."

But the more I thought about it the more I seemed to remember that Mr. Brand had gone home when we went. So I called him up on the telephone, and he said he had not let Jibby Jones out from under the pulpit. I began to worry, because under a pulpit is no place to spend the whole of Christmas Eve. I got my hat and coat and got Wampus Smale, and we chased around to the janitor's, and he said he had not let Jibby out, so we went to the Sunday School and unlocked the door and went in.

The loud-talker was still standing on top of the pulpit, and we took it off and tilted back the pulpit, and there—sure enough—was Jibby Jones! And he had one shoe off!

"Well, you see," he said, "I might have tipped the pulpit over and got out, but I rather thought the loud-talker was on top of it, and I did not want to break Reverend Bliss's Christmas present so soon after he got it."

"But what's the matter with your foot?" I asked. "Did you get a cramp in it?"

"Why, no!" Jibby said. "My father always says that it is best to make some use of our idle moments. I thought you might leave me under this pulpit all night, so I've been practicing chung-a-chunga flipping with my big toe."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BAND REVOLUTION

FROM Christmas on we had a mighty mean winter that year in Riverbank for alligator hunting. Our first big snow came just after the first of January, and from then on we had nothing but snow and cold weather until the big thaw came in March. The coasting was the best we had ever had in Riverbank and we put in a good deal of time at that. Hunting for the stuffed alligator was pretty slow work. There was not much chance of finding it in any of the caves or shacks because they were mostly snowed up and deserted, and we did not see a single alligator-skin bag that whole winter. We mostly let Jibby handle the job, and he did it by thinking of it. He thought of the stuffed alligator whenever he had any spare time, but did not have much spare time because the High School Band was keeping us mighty busy.

It was just practice, practice, practice all the time! Somehow, the band did not seem to get any better, and Professor Minch spent a lot of time tearing his hair and wishing he was dead. He said once that I was the only one in the band who was any good at all—that I carried water as well as any professional water-carrier could have done it—but that the rest seemed to be full of evil spirits and discords and hideous noises.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

It got along toward spring and March came, and with it the big warm spell and thaw. There hadn't been such a sudden thaw for years, and the water from the melting snow filled the gutters and overflowed into the streets, and all the rain-water sewers overflowed. Some parts of town were like lakes, and drifts of snow that were eight feet or ten feet tall melted like butter on a hot stove. It was as warm as July, and the ice in the river, which had been white with snow all winter, turned black overnight, and on the fourteenth of March, about four in the afternoon, the ice in the river began to go out, and it went out with a rush.

There were thousands down to see the ice go out, because right at the start it began piling up on the shore. The wind was blowing hard from the south, pushing the ice toward our shore, and you could hear it grind and roar as it piled up, even from two or three miles away. The word went around that the ice was piling up against the steamboat warehouse and that the old warehouse was liable to go out, so everybody went down to see what would happen.

When we got down there it was a sight worth seeing. All along the river, up and down as far as we could see, the ice was piled up twenty or thirty feet high. Out in the river the whole field of ice, almost a mile wide, was rushing downstream, and the wind was pushing it toward our shore, and back of it was hundreds of miles more of ice, all trying to get down-river as fast as it could.

Against the steamboat warehouse the ice had piled

THE BAND REVOLUTION

up in a mountain taller than the warehouse, and as the new ice came roaring up the side of this ice mountain it would reach the top and slide on up and break off and fall on the flat roof of the warehouse with a crash.

Already, when we got there, part of the roof had caved in. The warehouse was built partly on shore and partly on piles, and the ice had cut under on the river side, cutting the piles and then lifting that corner of the warehouse. But what worried us most was that Wampus Smale's motor-boat was tied up just below the warehouse, in the sort of bay there.

Ninety-nine years out of a hundred that would have been the safest place on the river for the boat, but this day the melted snow water had flooded all that part of the levee. Big cakes of ice came swirling from under the warehouse and slammed against the motor-boat. Nobody had thought of the boat—the ice was too interesting.

There wasn't anything we could do. Nobody would have gone out in a skiff if you paid them a thousand dollars, and while we were standing there the people on the other side of the warehouse gave a yell and there was a crash of breaking timbers and the whole old warehouse gave way and toppled slowly over on to Wampus's motor-boat, with about ten thousand tons of ice on top of that. Then the miles of ice above pushed on down and plowed through the warehouse and tore its boards apart and went crashing and splashing over where the warehouse had been. And that was the last anybody ever saw of that motor-boat. It may have been mashed so deep into the mud that it never

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

came out, or it may have been pushed on down the river a couple of hundred miles. I don't know. Anyway, it was gone.

It made us all feel pretty sick, because we had had a lot of fun on the river in that boat, but there wasn't anything we could do about it. We stood there, watching the ice crash over the place where the boat had been, and we didn't say anything. Only old Jibby, when we started back uptown at dark, put his arm on Wampus's shoulder and said:

"Now the Young Alligator Hunters have something to hunt—we'll try to hunt some way to get money to buy a new boat."

Well, the next meeting of the band, for practice, was the next Wednesday afternoon, just after school, and we met in the General Assembly room—or the Auditorium, as we called it sometimes. There were thirty-eight in the band and we sat on the platform in a sort of half-circle, with old Professor Minch standing at his music-rack in front of us, where he could see us all. The one who sat farthest back in the right-hand corner was Jibby Jones; this was because his pucco-molo was so big and long that it needed a lot of room; it reached clear across the back of the platform.

As soon as we were all seated on the platform, Professor Minch lifted his baton—and stopped! His face got red. I don't wonder that he got mad, either, for—here and there—one boy and another boy and John Julky were busy. They had their pocket-knives out and open and were scratching their names on their cornets

THE BAND REVOLUTION

or tubas or whatever instruments they happened to have.

"Stop that!" Professor Minch shouted. "What do you mean? How dare you, when I have told you not to do it!"

So John Julky stood up. He folded his arms and shook his head so that his hair shook too. He had always reminded me of something, but I had never been able to guess what, but I knew then—he looked like an anarchist. He even had a red tie. And he was an anarchist, one of the new kind they call Bolshevists. Or he thought he was. Maybe he thought it was smart to pretend to be one, and maybe he really was one. It all came to the same in the end. Now he stood up and tried to look fierce and dangerous and he spoke right out, and mighty rough, too.

"Comrades! Fellow down-trodden!" he shouted. "Attention! Listen to me! The day of the revolution has come! A few days ago we drove the Czar of the Music Union from his throne. We did well, but we did not do enough. The Music Union is still ruled by the capitalists and the middle-classes. That must end. I call on you all to join with me and change this state of things."

Well, six or eight of the fellows cheered—the fellows who had been spoiling their instruments by scratching them. I didn't cheer.

"Cut out the cheers," John Julky shouted. "We don't want cheers. We want action! I ask you, who rules the Music Union?"

Nobody answered. I guess we didn't know who

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

ruled it, unless it was ruled by old Professor Minch, and we paid him to do it.

"You don't answer!" John Julky shouted. "Tell me this then—who has to do the work? Who has to learn the music, and play the music, and work for the honor of the High School? Who has to come here and practice, in order that the High School may get the profit and the honor?"

"We do," the six or eight fellows shouted.

"Right!" John Julky screamed back at them, unfolding his arms and beating the air and tramping back and forth as if he was all excited. "We are the workers! We are the band! We're the whole thing! And we come here and toot and thump and—and carry water, and we don't dare say a thing about things. Why? Because the Music Union is made up of a lot of fellows and girls who don't work in the band and are only in the Union because they pay money to be in it. There are more of them than there are of us, and they can out-vote us. Comrades, I proclaim the Revolution!"

Well, I guess I must have been foolish or something, because when the others cheered I cheered, too. Maybe it was because he had mentioned the water-carrier especially. Nobody usually says anything about the water-carrier of a brass band. So John Julky pulled off his coat and slammed it on the floor, and pulled off his vest and slammed that on the floor, too, and shook both fists and got red in the face and just howled!

"They have done this in Russia," he screamed, "and we can do it here! I stand for the Bolshevik Revolu-

THE BAND REVOLUTION

tion in the Music Union! I stand for the ownership of the tools by the worker—I mean the ownership of the instruments by the players. And the ownership of the water pail by the water-carrier. What right has the Music Union non-working non-tooting non-thumping non-water-carrying crowd to own the instruments we make music with? None!”

“But they bought them,” Jibby Jones said, speaking up from the back row.

John Julky turned and scowled at him.

“Shut up!” he shouted. “Who cares who bought them? We play them and we ought to own them. I proclaim that we do own them!”

Well, that was regular Bolshevik stuff, but we were all sort of excited, and we swallowed it whole. It did seem to me that John Julky was “proclaiming” quite a lot, but it seemed mighty brave and fine to be in a revolution, and we all cheered again. So John Julky shook his fists again.

“I proclaim that the Music Union is dead, and that it don’t exist any longer!” he shouted. “I proclaim that we workers own our tools! I proclaim that the government by the Music Union is overthrown, never to rise again! I proclaim a new organization—the Players’ and Water-Carrier’s Soviet Government of the Riverbank High Scholo Brass Band!”

All this while old Professor Minch was so hopping mad that he was just jumping from one foot to the other, and now he shook his baton with a hand that trembled like a leaf.

“I’ll stop this! I’ll see about this!” he cried out,

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

and he threw his baton on the floor and got down off the platform and rushed down the aisle between the empty seats, and out of the building. He was going to see the Principal, Professor Claggs. John Julky pointed a finger at the back of Professor Minch.

"There goes the last of our slave-drivers!" he shouted. "Gone, never to return!"

And that was almost so. When Professor Minch told Professor Claggs what had happened, the Principal shrugged his shoulders.

"I have nothing to do with it," he said. "It doesn't concern me in the least. I tried to be of use to the Music Union and it would not let me be of use. Now it can run its own affairs. Don't come to me with your band troubles; I'm through with the band."

So there we were! Professor Claggs would not take a hand in the business, and the other members of the Music Union did not care a hoot, and the Players' and Water-Carrier's Soviet Government of the Riverbank High School Band was in full power. In Russia they killed most of the people who were against the Soviet, but we did not kill anybody, of course. We had only one to get rid of, and that was our Director—our teacher and band-master—old Professor Minch. And we got rid of him!

As soon as he left the Auditorium, John Julky said:

"The Players' and Water-Carrier's Government exists! I proclaim that it is in session. All in favor of getting rid of our tyrant, Minch, say 'Aye!' "

So we all shouted "Aye!" and John Julky proclaimed

THE BAND REVOLUTION

that Professor Minch was discharged and would never be allowed back again. Then he said:

"The Players' and Water-Carrier's Government will now choose its leaders. All in favor of me for a Director will say 'Aye!'"

About half said "Aye," but about half said "No," because they did think John Julky was running things a little too much, maybe. But that did not bother him.

"Who said 'No'?" he asked. "Those who said 'No' will hold up their hands."

Only about eight did.

"Comrades!" John Julky shouted, "you see those eight? I have had doubts about them from the first. They are not in sympathy with us. I proclaim them expelled from the Players' and Water-Carrier's Soviet!"

Well, that was an easy way to get rid of anybody who was against you! But it was the Soviet way.

"We don't want to be with you!" one of the eight declared, and the whole eight got up and started out.

"Here! You leave those horns here!" John Julky shouted. "They don't belong to you!"

"The workers own their tools," one of the eight said. "You said so!"

"If you're not in our gang you're not workers," John Julky said. "Nobody is a worker that is not with us; anybody that is not with us has no right to anything. We're it!"

Then he sort of smiled and said, to those of us who were left:

"I thank you for electing me. Now we will elect

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

our Assistant Leader. All in favor of Smudge Collins for Assistant Leader will say 'Aye!' "

Well, we all said "Aye," you can bet, for we wanted to stay in the band, but it was a mistake, for after that John Julky and Smudge Collins hardly gave anybody a chance to say anything. If anybody said a word, or even looked sidewise, John Julky or Smudge Collins would get up and proclaim him to be not in sympathy with the Players' and Water-Carrier's Soviet, and that fellow had to get out. If we had been in Russia, he would have been thrown into prison or shot or something, I suppose.

Anyway, as soon as they were elected, John Julky and Smudge Collins got together and talked a while and then John Julky picked up Professor Minch's baton and rapped on Professor Minch's music-rack.

"Attention, comrades!" he shouted. "Before we begin, the Government orders the Water-Carrier to go through the music-books and tear out page 18 from every book. The band will never play that tune. It stands for what we do not stand for."

Well, I picked up a book and turned to page 18, and what do you think the tune was? "The Star-Spangled Banner"!

"I won't——" I began; but John Julky was too slick for me.

"Ha!" he shouted—he was always shouting—"I suspected it! I had a notion he was an enemy and a spy! I proclaim——"

"You don't have to!" I shouted back. "I'm out! Jibby!"

THE BAND REVOLUTION

"What?" Jibby asked. "What, George?"

"Come on! Let's get out of this!"

"I can't, George," Jibby Jones said. "The band has to have a pucco-molo, and this is the only one there is. I own it and I won't let any one else play it. I've got to stay."

"Good boy!" John Julky said. "And as for you, you get out of here! If you don't get out, we'll throw you out."

So I went. I was glad it was not in Russia or I might have been thrown into prison or shot or something. But I could not understand why good old Jibby Jones, whose great-great-grandfather was in the American Revolution and knew George Washington, stayed. I found out later, all right!

CHAPTER XIX

THE COFFEE-GRINDER

AFTER the thaw that sent the ice out of the river and wrecked Wampus Smale's motor-boat, spring came in with a rush, and it looked pretty bad for our summer vacation on our island, because without a motor-boat to chase around in we could have only about half as much fun. We talked about buying one in partnership and having the Young Alligator Hunters all own it in company, but when we counted up our money we did not have enough to buy a flat-boat, let alone a motor-boat.

We thought there might be just a chance that Wampus's boat hadn't been absolutely demolished or swept away, and we went down to the levee to have a look, but there wasn't a sign of the boat. The workmen had cleared away all the wreckage of the warehouse and were driving piles for a new one, but the motor-boat was gone.

Tad Willing and Skippy and Wampus and I sat there a while on the edge of the river, but there wasn't anything we could do about it, and we started up the Avenue, on our way home, when we saw Jibby Jones coming out of the post-office.

"There's your Jibby Jones," Wampus said, sort of sarcastic. "Now you can see what he's good for. He's

THE COFFEE-GRINDER

always so smart—I suppose he can think my motor-boat back.”

“Aw, don’t talk nonsense!” I said. “Jibby’s all right, but you can’t expect him to think back a boat that is crushed to mince-meat and ground to pulp.”

“No, you bet I can’t!” Wampus said. “And that’s always the way with these terribly smart fellows. They can do everything except what you need them to do, and mend everything except what you need them to mend. I’m glad you’ve got some sense, George; I thought maybe you would expect Jibby Jones to poke his nose to windward and sniff the air, and then tell us about how the natives in Zanzibar mended a busted crocodile when Jibby and his father were there studying the Oompah-Boompah River, and then take an old shoe and a piece of cheese and bring back my motor-boat in half a minute! One of these days you’ll find out that your Jibby Jones is not as smart as you think he is. You and your Jibby make me sick.”

Well, that might have made me sore if I had not known that Wampus was feeling sore himself. So I did not go back at him very hard; all I said was:

“That’s all right, but I bet if that had been Jibby’s boat, he would not have left it where you did.”

“Oh, quit!” Tad Willing exclaimed. “What’s the use in ragging about what happened to the boat? We want to know how we can raise money to buy a new boat before vacation begins. How can we get the money?”

We talked that over all the rest of the way home, and we could not figure out how we could raise any

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

money at all. We all had to go to school and the only time we had was in the afternoon, after school was over for the day, and Saturday, and there did not seem to be any way to raise much money in Riverbank just then, anyway. We went into my yard and sat on the grass and tried to think of a good way to raise the money, and we were all lolling on the grass and picking a dandelion now and then to pull to pieces, when Skippy Root sat up and gave a yell of joy. We all sat up and looked down the street and what we saw was enough to make a horse laugh. Up the sidewalk Jibby Jones was coming, and he was coming so slowly he hardly moved.

Our sidewalks are made of boards and the boards are put an inch apart, to let the rain run through, and the walks on our street were rather worn. And there came Jibby Jones, tall as a beanpole, with his funny little straw hat on his head and his high-water pants and his coat-sleeves halfway to his elbows and his long nose that stuck out like the jib of a sailboat. He was bent over until his back looked like the back of a camel, and the reason was that he was pulling one of those little boy toy wagons and there was some sort of tall iron machine-like business on it. While Jibby pulled the wagon with one hand, he had to keep the other hand on the machine-like affair to keep it from falling over as the wagon bumped over the planks of the sidewalk. So he was sort of edging along sideways like a crab, with his elbows stuck out like two wings and his eyes as serious as an owl's as he watched that machine-like thing through his shell-rimmed spectacles.



THE WHOLE BUSINESS TOPPLED OVER

THE COFFEE-GRINDER

And just as he reached our gate, one of the wagon wheels went off the side of the walk and the whole business toppled over on to the grass at the side of the walk. Jibby straightened up and stretched his back and saw us. He looked at us and then at the wagon.

"This lightning express has had an accident," he said.

We all piled out of the yard then and got around the machine thing.

"For the love of Mike!" Tad exclaimed. "What on earth is it?"

"It's a coffee-grinder," Jibby said, as solemn as ever. "It's not a good one; it does not grind fine enough any more."

And that was what it was, too. It was about the oldest-fashioned coffee-grinder on earth, I guess. It looked as if it had been made in the year One and never painted since then.

"A coffee-grinder?" Wampus hooted. "What do you want a played-out busted-down no-good coffee-grinder for?"

Jibby turned his head on one side and looked at the coffee-grinder as if that was a new thought that had not occurred to him before.

"Why—why—" he said—"why, I don't know. Mr. Beasley did not want it, because it was not worth anything any more——"

Well, we all hooted then. If it wasn't like Jibby Jones to borrow a kid's toy wagon and pick up a no-good busted old coffee-mill and haul it all the way uphill! His face got a little red when we laughed.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"You see," he said, for I guess he thought he ought to explain as well as he could, "I was thinking of Zanzibar and the time my father and I were there——"

"I told you! I told you!" Wampus shouted. "Zanzibar! Didn't I say so?"

Jibby looked at him in a puzzled way for half a minute, then he gave it up; he could not see the joke.

"I was at Mr. Beasley's grocery store when he unpacked his new coffee-grinder," he said, "and I helped him carry this old one out back of the store and dump it in the waste pile. And I just happened to think, 'My! but the natives of Zanzibar would love to have this old coffee-grinder!'——"

"What for?" I asked Jibby. "Why would they love to have it?"

"I don't know," Jibby said. "It just looks like the sort of thing a native of Zanzibar would love to have. He could—he could turn the wheel."

"What good would that do him?" Tad asked.

"I don't know. It wouldn't do him any good," Jibby said. "But he would just love to have a machine that looks as machiney as this and that has a wheel he could turn. Any native of Zanzibar would. He would give a ton of ivory for a machine like this, especially if the wheel squeaked when he turned it. He would love it. Everybody would envy him and come and beg him to let them turn the wheel—turn it just once. So I thought it would be a pity to let this coffee-mill lie there on the dump heap and go to waste."

THE COFFEE-GRINDER

"Why? Do you expect to go back to Zanzibar?" one of us asked him.

"No; I never expect to be there again——"

"Well, do you know anybody that is going there—anybody that would want to pack up an old played-out coffee-grinder and tote it all the way to Zanzibar?"

"No, I don't know anybody that would do that. I don't know anybody that is going to Zanzibar."

"Then I can't see why you have gone to all the trouble of hauling the old junk all the way up the hill," declared Wampus. "I would not give a cent for it! You couldn't make me take it for a gift!"

"That's so, isn't it?" admitted Jibby, looking at the old coffee-mill as if he was seeing it in a new light for the first time. "It is useless, isn't it? I was silly to bother hauling it up the hill, wasn't I? But it did seem foolish to leave it there—a thing the natives of Zanzibar would think was so precious. It seemed such a waste."

"Well, you can't leave it there," I said. "My father don't want Mr. Beasley's old junk left on his sidewalk, that's sure! He's not a native of Zanzibar."

"That's so!" Jibby said. "I'd better take it on home, I guess."

So he boosted the old coffee-grinder back on to the toy wagon, and it was all he could do to lift it; we helped him. The little wagon groaned under the load. That coffee-grinder was three feet high and must have weighed almost one hundred pounds. And the minute we got it on the wagon it toppled off the other side!

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

Jibby took off his hat and wiped his forehead and shook his head.

"I've had an awful lot of trouble with that coffee-grinder," he said. "It has been falling every ten feet. Just that same way!"

"Come in and rest, then," I said. "You can't be in much of a rush if there isn't much chance of the natives of Zanzibar getting that coffee-mill for a hundred years or so."

And Jibby went into the yard with us and presently we were talking about the motor-boat again, because that was what was bothering us most. Jibby sat with his long legs spread out and listened to what we had to say about it and then he asked us a question that certainly seemed about as foolish as any question anybody could ask.

"If you need money," he asked, "why don't you get some?"

"Get some? Where?" we asked him. "Selling old coffee-grinders to the natives of Zanzibar?"

"No," he answered seriously. "No; I don't think that would pay. Zanzibar is too far away. I don't know any one there to ship coffee-grinders to. And you couldn't get enough old coffee-grinders to make it worth while. The freight would cost more money than we have. No; we'll have to think of something nearer than Zanzibar. It ought to be something right here in Riverbank—something there is plenty of."

"Dandelions," said Wampus. "There are plenty of them here. Why don't you think of them?"

Well, Wampus was right! There were plenty of

THE COFFEE-GRINDER

dandelions in Riverbank. That year there were millions of them—billions, I guess! It was a dandelion year. I don't know whether you have ever happened to notice it, but the wild flowers we call "weeds" do run in "years." One year whole fields—acres and acres—will be white with daisies, and the next year there will be hardly any. One year the dandelions will be only about as usual, and another year the whole county will look as if it had been painted golden yellow. And another year will be a goldenrod year, or an aster year. It depends on the weather, mostly; how much rain, or how much dry weather. Everything that grows is like that; one year will be a "good apple year" and then there are heaps of apples and they are cheap, and another year will be a "poor apple year" and that year apples will be high. In the same way there are good years for corn and wheat and oats, and bad years for them. But there is one thing about dandelions—it takes a mighty bad year to be a genuine bad dandelion year. The dandelion is a mighty hardy and easy-coming plant. And a hard one to get rid of. And this year there were millions. Every lawn in town was full of them. I looked around and it seemed as if I could see a couple of million from right where I sat. And then Jibby said what we did not expect him to say.

"Yes, that's a good idea," he said. "I'll think about dandelions."

"Well, you needn't," said Wampus flatly. "You

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

take my advice and don't waste your time thinking about dandelions."

"Why?" Jibby asked.

"Because we've had all the dandelion jobs we want, and don't want any more, and we won't have any more! We're through dandelioning!"

"You bet!" I said. "We're through!"

"So if your idea is that you can get us to raise money by digging dandelions, you're wrong!" Wampus declared. "You can forget that idea here and now! We've had plenty of it, and more than plenty. We are wise. A couple of years ago some of the men in town here offered to pay us one cent for every ten dandelions we dug out of their lawns and we worked like slaves at it. It's hard work."

"And a fellow has to have some time to play," Tad agreed. "That spring we hustled home from school and got into our old clothes and piled out and dug dandelions. We worked, digging dandelions, until dark every school day, and all day Saturday——"

"How long?" Jibby asked.

"Well, three days," I admitted. "That was all we could stand. Three days of it was enough to last us the rest of our lives. It is hard work, Jibby, and mean work. I don't want any more of it."

None of us did, and we all said so. Just to look at the dandelions was enough to discourage a fellow; there were so many of them.

"They have such long roots," I said, "and you have to dig up the whole root, and then you only get a few cents for digging them. Why, they can't even get the

THE COFFEE-GRINDER

little kids to dig them any more! A fellow starts in digging some for somebody and then his father says, 'Here, George, if you want to dig dandelions you had better come and dig them out of our own yard'; and you have to do it!"

CHAPTER XX

LIVER—COFFEE

WELL, we thought we had settled that dandelion business. Jibby Jones took out his old jack-knife and tried digging a few. He dug about a dozen, and he was as poor a hand at it as I ever saw. We told him it would take about a year to earn a dollar, digging them that awkward way, and we showed him how to dig them better. When we had dug ten or twelve apiece, he said:

"Yes, I see; but I don't think I would ever amount to much as a dandelion-digger. Not unless I can think of some better way."

"Some fine way," Wampus sneered, "like the way you thought up to catch alligators, stuffed or unstuffed."

Jibby looked at Wampus a minute. Then he said:

"How did you know I had thought of a way to catch the alligator, Wampus? It's peculiar, because I only thought of it a little while ago—while I was pulling the coffee-grinder up the hill."

"And a lot of good it will do you," Wampus said. "By this time that alligator is ten times as far down the river as my motor-boat is."

"No, Wampus," Jibby said in his slow way. "The alligator is still in the river here. It has been seen again. It has been stealing food again."

LIVER-COFFEE

Well, we were all excited when we heard that. Jibby said he had heard it in the post-office. Rufus Hicks, the alligator hunter, had seen it, and a farmer had seen its tracks where it had wallowed up through the mud to his pig-pen. It hadn't got a pig, because his pen was too strong, but it had almost. If his pen hadn't been so stout it would have.

We talked about the alligator a while and then Jibby gathered up the dandelions we had dug and started out of the yard to go on up the hill with that old coffee-grinder, but we went with him and helped him home with it. We took it around to his woodshed and dumped it there and got ready to sit around and have a good talk about the alligator, but Jibby said:

"You can sit here and talk a while, but I want to go in the house. I want to think about something."

"What?" Wampus asked; "dandelions?"

"Yes," Jibby said. "We've talked a lot about them, but we have not thought everything that can be thought about them, I guess. There must be a lot to think about dandelions or there wouldn't be so many of them."

We gave him a loud hoot then, and Wampus said:

"Well, you might as well do some thinking about Zanzibar and coffee-grinders while you are about it."

"I'm going to," Jibby said, as solemn as an owl. "I want to think a little about a coffee-grinder my father had when we were in Zanzibar. It was just a small one, but it ground all the coffee we could use. And when my father made our coffee, he never would use anything but pure spring water from a spring on the other side of the ridge back of the house, and I

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

had to get the water. Every day, three times a day, I had to get the water. So I hated to do it. And no wonder, because there was a little Zanzibar kid I played with, and we had to stop playing when it was water-getting time. So my father got up a game. He gave us each a small tin pail and took out his watch and counted 'One, two, three, go!' and it was a race to see whether the Zanzibar kid or I got back first, and which had the most water left in the pail. Getting back first counted fifty, and having the most water left counted fifty. So we raced for it and counted the points, and whoever won got a prize."

"What was the prize?" I asked.

"Whoever won the water race could grind the coffee," said Jibby; and then he went into the house.

Well, we sat around and gabbled for about an hour, and Jibby did not come out, and we thought we had better go in and get him before he thought his head off. We all piled into his house, and there he was in his father's study, weighing out dandelions on the letter-scales.

"Leaves and all, just as they run," he said, "these spring dandelions run sixty-four to the pound. That's about six to an ounce and half—three ounces for twelve. If we got paid a cent for ten dandelions, it would be six and a half cents a pound, about, tops and all. If we paid three cents a pound for dandelions, we would make three and one half cents on every pound we bought."

"He's gone crazy!" Tad said. "He's talking about buying dandelions. I don't want to buy any dande-

LIVER-COFFEE

lions, do you? What would we do with dandelions if we did buy them?" he asked Jibby.

"Nothing," Jibby said. "We couldn't. We'd have to throw them away, except the tops. Maybe we could sell the tops as greens, like spinach, for a cent a pound."

"Pay three cents and sell for one cent!" Wampus hooted. "We'd get rich at that, wouldn't we?"

"But we would make our contracts first," Jibby said.

"What contracts?" I asked. "This is the first I've heard about contracts!"

"You didn't give me time to say anything about them," Jibby said. "The contracts would be with our fathers and with other men that have lawns in Riverbank. At the same old price, ten dandelions for a cent. We would sign them all up to pay us one cent for every ten dandelions we got dug from their lawns, and we would buy no dandelions except those dug from those lawns. That would be six and one half cents a pound. Then we would get one hundred boys and girls to dig the dandelions, and we would pay them three cents a pound. We would make three and one half cents a pound on every pound, and an extra cent a pound on any dandelion leaves we could sell for greens. If our hundred diggers dug only one pound a day, it would give us three dollars and fifty cents or four dollars. In ten days we would have forty dollars, and that would help toward the motor-boat."

"Yes! Sure! Of course!" said Wampus, in his most sarcastic tone. "Only you can't get one hundred boys and girls to dig dandelions. You can't get one

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

boy or girl in this whole town to dig dandelions!"

"No, Jibby," I said, "you can't. They won't do it. If you can get twenty boys or girls to dig dandelions, I'll say you are a wizard of the Nile and a genuine Zanzibar magician."

"Of course, I don't know the Riverbank folks very well," Jibby said seriously, "but I think I can do it. Yes, I do think so."

"How?" we asked him. "How will you make them dig dandelions?"

"With my coffee-grinder," Jibby said.

Well, that was almost too much! I have as much faith in Jibby Jones as any one has, and I had seen him do things we thought no one could ever do, but it did sound as if he was talking nonsense when he pretended he could make Riverbank kids dig dandelions with a coffee-grinder.

"Are you going to turn it into a plow?" Skippy Root asked.

Jibby looked at him as if he was surprised.

"Why, no," he said. "The folks wouldn't want us to plow up their lawns, would they? And I wouldn't know how to turn a coffee-mill into a plow. I'm going to set up the coffee-mill and run it."

"For the land's sake!" Tad exclaimed. "Run a coffee-mill to make a hundred kids dig dandelions? What ever gave you that crazy idea?"

"The dictionary," Jibby said.

"The dictionary?"

"Yes. My father always says that when a man doesn't know enough about a thing to think about it

LIVER-COFFEE

properly, he ought to look it up in a dictionary or an encyclopædia, so I looked up 'dandelions' in the dictionary," Jibby said, "and the dictionary says the dandelion is a well-known plant, *Taraxacum officinale*, of the natural order *Compositæ*, having a naked fistulous scape with one large bright-yellow flower, and a tapering, milky, perennial root. It is found under several forms over the whole of Europe, central and northern Asia, and——"

"And our front yard," said Wampus. "Mostly in our front yard."

"The root," said Jibby, paying no attention to Wampus, "has been used as a substitute for coffee."

"Oh, you coffee-mill!" laughed Wampus.

"The dandelion," said Jibby, quoting from his dictionary, "acts as an aperient and tonic and is esteemed as a remedy in affections of the liver."

"So all we need," teased Tad, "is an affectionate liver."

"'Affection of the liver' means sickness of the liver," Jibby explained without even a sign of a smile. "It means that dandelion is good for sick livers."

"Well," laughed Tad, "that ought to make the kids in this town dig dandelions, I'll say! We'll just go up to a boy and say, 'Say, kid, the dandelion has a naked fistulous scape and is good for the liver—go and dig a couple of tons!'—and they'll be crazy to. I can see them rushing off to dig!"

Old Jibby looked at Tad through his shell-rimmed spectacles.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"I'm afraid you don't seem to take me seriously, Theodore," he said.

"I'm not afraid I don't," Wampus interrupted, "I know I don't."

Well, it was eating time then and we had to scatter home, and we did not think much about Jibby and his old coffee-grinder and the dandelions the next day, except to talk fun about them, but the next day after that, at noon, my father said:

"George, I wish you had some of the business spirit of this lanky Jones boy. He came to my office this morning before school and made a contract with me to clear the lawn of dandelions."

"Ten for a cent?" I asked, looking up from my fried potatoes.

"Exactly that," said my father. "And I understand he has contracted to clean all the lawns in this end of town at the same price."

"Is that so?" I said. "When does he begin?"

"Soon," said my father. "He would not set a date, but he said his men would be on the job soon."

"Maybe!" I laughed. "Maybe so!"

"You don't think he can get boys to dig dandelions, son?" my father asked. "Well, I'm not so sure, myself, that he can."

Of course, as soon as school was out that afternoon, we got at Jibby, but he was not excited or hurried or worried, as a fellow with a lot of dandelion contracts should be. He did not rush around asking kids to come and dig dandelions. He walked up the hill with us, and up to his home, and when we got there he

LIVER-COFFEE

asked us to help him put the old coffee-grinder in the side yard. We carried it to where he thought he wanted it and helped him set it up on a solid block of wood, and just as we got it up a couple of small boys poked their faces between the pickets of the fence and Mr. Beasley's grocery wagon drove up with about forty-seven empty boxes—canned tomato boxes and soap boxes and all kinds. The groceryman tossed the boxes over the fence and went away, and the two small boys asked what we were doing. They asked what the coffee-grinder was and what the boxes were.

"Never you mind!" Jibby said, and went right on doing what he was doing, which was making four or six signs on cardboard. Some of them said, "3 Cents a Pound paid for Dandelions, roots and leaves," and the others said, "For Sale Here—Jibby Jones's Home-Made Liver-Coffee; made from choice selected Riverbank Dandelions."

"What you doing? What you going to do?" the two small boys coaxed; and Jibby looked at them sternly.

"I'm going to manufacture liver-coffee out of dandelion roots," Jibby said. "This is the factory and this is the machine to grind the roots in."

"Do you pay real money for dandelions?" the boy asked.

"Yes, I do!" Jibby said. "That's what the sign says, doesn't it?"

"He buys dandelions," one boy said to the other, and that boy was certainly a surprised boy. He had never heard of any one buying anything that was so

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

plentiful as dandelions and so easy to find. Why, there were whole fortunes in dandelions scattered everywhere!

"Can we sell dandelions to you, if we dig some?" the boy asked.

"Yes, you can," Jibby said. "I want to keep this liver-coffee-mill grinding steady and regular; I want to fill all these boxes and a lot more with liver-coffee. Here"—he said to me—"you go and get a few pails of water to wash the roots in. Tad, you help Wampus pile those boxes. Skippy, you take this crayon and make a sign—say, 'Dandelion makes an excellent substitute for coffee. Dandelion is an aperient and tonic and good in affections of the liver.' Here's two dollars in change; we pay three cents a pound for all dandelions, but they must come from our own contracted lawns. I've got to hunt up our scales. Don't buy over five hundred pounds to-day."

Jibby hustled off to find the scales and I twirled the handle of the coffee-grinder a couple of times, and in a few minutes there were twenty small boys and girls and some our own size peering into the yard, and by the time Jibby returned with the scales they were asking where they could dig dandelions.

Jibby told them, and they scooted away to get to work, and more and more boys and girls came hurrying to find out if it was true that somebody was really willing to buy dandelions for cash. Before night he had more than one hundred dandelion diggers on the job.

"I thought maybe it would work that way," Jibby

LIVER-COFFEE

drawled, "because folks like to sell things and they don't often like to work at a digging job. When you work at a digging job, you look to see how many more you have to dig, and it makes you tired, but when you are selling things, you look to see how many more there are, and it makes you glad."

Well, it was a fact! I had hated to think of digging dandelions at ten for a cent, but I found myself thinking I would put in a little time digging a few to sell to Jibby Jones! It seemed such an easy way to make money, when the dandelions we sold were to be had for nothing! But Jibby would not have me dig dandelions.

"I need you to weigh and grind and wash," he said. "If this works the way I think it will, we five are going to have all we can do to keep the factory going. People ought to begin to come here for dandelion greens soon, and somebody will have to handle that part of the affair. And if we get these boxes filled with ground dandelion root, some of us will have to empty the boxes in the barn or somewhere until the dandelion season is over and we can dump the worthless stuff somewhere out of the road."

Well, we kept that old coffee-grinder pretty busy, you can bet! It did look like a real factory, with some of us weighing dandelions and paying the diggers, and some of us washing the dandelions, and some of us cutting off the roots and assorting the tops, and some of us grinding and shifting the boxes. In almost no time the three hundred diggers had all the contracted lawns cleaned out, and Jibby had to make new con-

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

tracts. Of course, the kids could work only after school, but we averaged about five hundred pounds of dandelions a day—a profit of about twenty dollars for every day.

About a week and a half after the liver-coffee started, we were working away like mad, trying to get all the roots ground before the diggers swamped us with another lot, when an old man came up to the fence and looked over.

“Hello,” he said; “you have a liver-coffee factory here, haven’t you? Joe Hentz, he told me so, but I couldn’t a-hardly believe him. How much a pound do you charge for it?”

“Charge for it?” Jibby asked, mighty surprised. “How much do we charge for the dandelion coffee?”

“Yes, how much?” the old man asked. “I’d like to buy a pound or so. Back in Civil War days I drunk a lot of it, and I got to like it right well. Tastes good and sort of tonics me up and helps my liver. How much you charge?”

“Oh, nothing!” Jibby said. “We’ll give you some.”

“No, you won’t!” the old man said. “I kin pay. How about ten cents for a pound of it?”

“That would be all right,” Jibby said. “One pound? George, you go in and get a bag or something while I weigh out a pound of liver-coffee for the gentleman.”

Well, you could have knocked me over with a feather. To think of anybody actually wanting to buy Jibby Jones’s ground dandelion root! But that was not all; the old man told one and another and still an-

LIVER-COFFEE

other about the liver-coffee, and other folks began stopping at the fence to ask the price and to buy a pound or a half-pound. We did not sell much, of course, but there was some profit in what we did sell, I'll say! We paid three cents a pound, and the lawn-owners paid us six and a half cents, so we made three and one half cents on every pound that way. And then a cent a pound for some of the leaves for greens and ten cents for the ground roots!

"Jibby," I said, "I surrender! If this keeps on, it won't be a question of buying a motor-boat; you can buy a steamboat and a yacht and an airplane and a submarine."

"No," he said seriously, "I don't think we will make that much. And it is not my money; it is our crowd's money."

That was just like old Jib, wasn't it? We didn't know how to say how much we liked that, so we just piled on to him and rolled him around on the grass and pelted him with dandelion leaves, and we were giving him a dandelion-leaf shower when H. P. Martin came into the yard.

We quit roughing Jibby, because H. P. Martin is an important citizen and a druggist and makes Martin's Soothing Balm wholesale. He walked up to old Jibby.

"Jones?" he asked. "Well, Jones, I understand you are getting quite a little trade in your liver-coffee. A clever idea, Jones. I was thinking that if it was put up in a neat quarter-pound package and properly advertised as Martin's Guaranteed Liver-Coffee, it might

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

sell well. So this is my proposition: I'll give you eight cents a pound for all the dandelion root you can deliver to me."

Oh, boy! Eight cents a pound! For all of it!

Well, Jibby did not say anything. He felt here and there in the heaps of dandelion leaves on one side of him and then here and there in the leaves on the other side, pawing them over.

"What's the matter?" asked H. P. Martin rather sharply. "Don't you like my proposition?"

"Proposition?" said Jibby. "Oh, yes! Of course, we like your proposition. We'll accept your proposition. But I can't find my spectacles and my nose feels naked."

That was like Jibby Jones. He never was much interested in the pay end of a game; what he liked was doing a thing to see if he could do it. And he could do it, too, mostly.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BAND CONTEST

I SUPPOSE the liver-coffee must have been some good for the liver, or was not bad for it, because Mr. Martin certainly did a big business. In a little while Riverbank was so cleaned out of dandelions that, if one happened to show its yellow head, three kids were right there to jump for it, and the lawns all looked like velvet. We made a lot of money, but before long the dandelion season began to play out. What I mean is that people only use these herb teas and dandelion coffees in the spring, and it was getting along toward summer. Mr. Martin said he would take all the ground root we could supply, because he could use it next year, but the diggers sort of quit digging because the dandelions were too few and too far apart.

I wasn't very sorry, because examinations were due pretty soon, and the band contest was coming along, and we all had plenty to do. The band was getting to be pretty awful.

John Julky and Smudge Collins knew just enough about music to think they knew it all, and when John Julky had pulled off the revolution in the band he made himself teacher of the band, although what he needed more than anything else was a teacher to teach him a few things himself. If the noises that band had

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

once made were like cats and dogs fighting, the noises they made now were like a whole menagerie that had eaten something that made it sick—mighty sick. The only noise that sounded human at all was Wampus, when he hit the drum. There were four cornets, and no two of the four ever hit the same note at the same time. It was as if you took forty giant phonographs and started them all playing different tunes at once. One afternoon the band was practicing and struck up a tune just as old Mrs. Kingley was in front of the High School. She had had the rheumatism so bad that she had had to walk with crutches for seventeen years, but when that noise came out of the place where the Riverbank Soviet Band was, she gave a yell and jumped three feet right up in the air, and dropped her crutches and ran eight blocks like a startled deer, and when she got home she made one dive and got between her feather-bed and her mattress.

And the trouble with the band was that the longer it had Soviet government, the worse it got. So one day Smudge Collins said to John Julky:

"It's no use, John. I know what's the matter. This must be a good band, because it is a Soviet band, and you and I are Bolshevists, and what we think is the right way to run a band must be the right way, but this band can't play United States music. It's a Bolshevik band and the only kind of music it can play is Bolshevik music."

"Well, I guess that's so," John Julky said, wiping the perspiration from his face. "The only trouble is

THE BAND CONTEST

that we haven't any Bolshevik music. What is it like?"

"It must be something like the sounds the band is making," Smudge Collins said. "And I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll compose a tune myself. I'll write it down and make copies of it, and we'll call it the Bolshevik International Hymn, and we'll teach the band to play it, and we'll play it at the State Inter-School Contest. And, even if we don't get a prize, maybe the Bolshevik International Hymn that I write will be adopted by the Bolsheviks all over the world, and it will be fine for us—for you and me. Maybe I'll make a lot of money selling copies, and maybe you'll make a lot of money teaching it to Bolshevik bands."

So Smudge Collins did write a Bolshevik Hymn: I heard the band practice it. I never heard anything like it, and I bet you never did, either. There were places where nothing happened but Wampus Smale, and he stood up and whanged his bass drum as fast and hard as he could. That was the "battle." Then a saxophone would wail like a homesick dog tied in a dark cellar, and that, I suppose, was the children and babies starving. Then all the instruments would do whatever they pleased, just so it was a noise, for a minute or two. The only tune in it was played by one cornet, and it played the same air over and over, starting when it pleased and ending when it pleased, but always beginning again as soon as it ended. The tune was:

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"Hallelujah, I'm a bum;
Hallelujah, bum again;
Hallelujah, give us a hand-out
To revive us again."

Well, it came along to the time for the State Contest, and it was mighty lucky that it was to be held at Derlingport, because that is only thirty miles from Riverbank. John Julky and Smudge Collins had forgotten all about money for the fares and the hotel and so on. Soviets always do make a mess of money matters, I guess.

Anyway, the band started off all right. It went down to the station and the Treasurer bought the tickets and off the band went on the train for Derlingport. John Julky and Smudge Collins were as brassy as a brass doorknob or they would never have dared to take that bunch of awful noise anywhere, let alone to a State Contest. But they did, and it played in the contest, too. Or I suppose you would call it playing.

The contest was in May, at Derlingport Fair Grounds, and there was a good audience in the grandstand when the contest began. The judges were three men who knew what good band-playing is, and they had chairs and pads and pencils and sat in the paddock, which is the grassy place in front of the grandstand. The bands were seated around the judges in a sort of half-circle—eight of them. It was in the afternoon.

Well, just a second before the contest began, an automobile came rushing into the Fair Grounds and rushed up to the race-track fence and six men jumped out and climbed over the fence and ran toward the

THE BAND CONTEST

Riverbank High School Band. The men were Professor Claggs and Professor Minch and four of the School Directors, and they had come from Riverbank forty miles an hour to stop our band from playing in the contest.

They begged and pleaded, and Professor Claggs and Professor Minch almost cried. They said Riverbank High School would be disgraced forever and be a laughing-stock while the world lasted if that band played in that contest. But John Julky and Smudge Collins would not budge an inch. They had come to play the Bolshevik International Hymn and they meant to play it. The judges would not do anything about it, either. They said that the band had entered the contest and that unless the band wanted to withdraw there was nothing to be done about it. So the Professors and the School Directors left the paddock and went over to the grandstand and sat down, looking mighty gloomy. And the first band to play was the West Marion High School Band, winner of eight first prizes, four second prizes, and one Special Cup for Meritorious Rendition Not Included in the Programme. The Special Cup was a dandy, always, about two feet high and of silver, and some years was not awarded at all. It never was awarded unless the judges thought something special in the way of band-playing had been done.

So West Marion played and played dandy. Sousa's Band could not have played much better. Then Corleyville, and Franklin, and Meadow Falls, and Cedar City, and the others played, and any one that heard

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

them knew why they had come to the contest—they could play! As those bands played, each playing the piece it knew it could play best, John Julky and Smudge Collins began to get sort of green in the gills. John Julky began to see that the crazy noises Smudge Collins had written into a piece was nothing but silly lunacy, and Smudge Collins began to see that the way John Julky had trained the band would make a sick horse laugh itself to death. Then one of the judges stood up and announced Riverbank High School.

“River — bank — High — School!” he shouted through a megaphone. “This—is—River—bank’s—first—entrance—in—these—contests! River—bank —High—School!”

Then he sat down and John Julky stood up and raised his wand.

And right then—just at that moment—old Jibby Jones stood up and walked the whole length of that long pucco-molo of his.

“Jones!” John Julky said sharply.

But Jibby paid no attention to him. Jibby got down on his stomach and wriggled half his length into the huge big tube of his pucco-molo and pulled and yanked at something, and out he backed with a coat and a vest and a pair of pants, all rolled up in a ball. He threw them on the grass and went back to the mouth-piece end of his pucco-molo.

“Ready!” snapped John Julky, and rapped twice on his music-stand. He raised his wand and brought it down.

Well, Jibby Jones got just one instant’s start of the

THE BAND CONTEST

rest of the band. When he blew the first note on that pucco-molo, every one in the grandstand jumped, and one of the judges fell over backward, and three horses down on Main Street, Derlingport, three miles away, ran away. John Julky waved his wand and the River-bank Soviet Band puffed and blew, and Wampus hammered at his bass drum, but you could not hear a sound of it. The pucco-molo bellowed and boomed, and its noise shook the grandstand and drowned every other noise, and every one stood up and yelled and cheered, for the tune Jibby Jones was making crack the sky and shake the earth was the one that begins:

“Oh! say, can you see by the dawn’s early light
What so proudly we hailed . . . ”

As the good old “Star-Spangled Banner” boomed out, the sounds made by the rest of the band were like whispers and tinkles that did not matter, and when Jibby ended the head judge whispered a moment to the two other judges and then shouted through his megaphone:

“To—the—River—bank—High—School—Band—
is—award—ed—the—Spesh—ul—Cup—for—the—
most—remarkable—play—ing—of—the—Star—Span—
—gled—Banner—the—judges—have—ever—heard!”

For a minute John Julky looked sick; then he went over and accepted the cup. But that was about all we ever heard of John Julky. Or of Smudge Collins. The next day the band met and voted that the Bolshevik sort of government was no good and that it would not have it any more. And it had a reason, too,

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

for—you see—two of the School Directors went home by train and made room for Jibby Jones and the pucco-molo in the automobile, but the rest of the band, when the Treasurer had paid the hotel bill, found it did not have a cent left to pay car-fare, and it had to walk thirty miles home to Riverbank!

When I saw Wampus he said:

“I’m going to learn to play the fife.”

I said, “Why?”

And he said, “Did you ever walk thirty miles carrying a big bass drum?”

CHAPTER XXII

ZORA MAY

WELL, after the band contest we all had to buckle down to hard work in school, because the exams were coming along. It was hard work, too, because the air was full of spring smells and the sun was warm, and every time we passed a corner we could see the old river flowing by, waiting for us to get through with school and get up to our island and begin our summer fun.

That was along in May. June made it a little easier to tackle the school work. Some days it was almost too hot to study, but to offset that, June brought what we call the "June rise," when the old river goes on a rampage, and this year it went on a good one. Orpheus Cadwallader came down from the island and said the water was two feet deep around his shack, which was the highest part of the island; around some of the cottages the water was eight feet deep, and in Mosquito Hollow it was ten or twelve. Everything was flooded, and he had his pigs and his chickens living in his shack with him.

None of that was very unusual, although the river only got that high every three or four years, but it meant there was no use even thinking of going to the island before July, even if we had no school. For a week or two after the river falls, the island is mud,

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

and it takes a week or so to clean out the cottages, because in very high water the mud gets into them. But about the middle of June the river began to fall.

We did not get up to the island until the eighth of July. By that time the river was back where it belonged and the mud on the island had dried enough. Parcell took us up in his big motor-boat and we all set to work to clean up the cottages and get things in shape, and Orpheus Cadwallader had about ten times as much as he could do. One of our mothers would need something done, and just when she had set Orph to work at it another mother would need him. So, along about five o'clock in the evening, Orph was about played out, and he said he guessed he would row over to the Iowa shore and see if he couldn't get Carter Calverton to come over the next day and help him out with the work there was still to be done.

He came back about eight o'clock and he was so excited he could hardly talk. It was a good while before we could make head or tail of what he was trying to tell us, he was so out of breath and worked up, but when we did understand what he was getting at it was a pretty dreadful thing.

The water, while the river was high, had gone over Carter Calverton's cornfield as usual and had come right up to his cabin. Now the water had gone down, but the field was still too wet to plant, and Carter had been working for a farmer up on the hill, waiting for his field to dry. He had been up there, and May—his spotty wife—had been out back of her cabin doing

ZORA MAY

some washing, and the baby, Zora May, had been playing in the sand in front of the cabin.

Well, along about five o'clock, just about when Orph left our island to row over there to Carter Calverton's, May Calverton got through with her washing. She went into the cabin and put her piece of laundry soap in the sink, and then went out front to see how Zora May was getting along, and she didn't see her. She called, but Zora May did not answer, and that frightened her some, because the river was always there and she thought Zora May might have waded in and got drowned, but down below the cabin a ways was a clump of willows, and she thought Zora May might be hiding behind them.

So May Calverton started for the willows, but the first thing she came to made her stop. In the sand close by the water she saw where Zora May had been playing—walking around and building a sort of house with driftwood—and from the river's edge to where Zora May had been was the track of the alligator. There were scratches in the sand, as if Zora May had scratched with her fingers, trying to hold back as the alligator dragged her into the water.

The first thing May Calverton did was to faint. She told Orpheus that she seemed to see that poor little black kid in the alligator's jaws, and the cruel teeth crunching into her, and she felt herself going weak, and the next thing she knew she was coming out of the faint. Then she ran up and down the shore, more than half crazy, and then started for the hill farm

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

where Carter was working, shrieking and yelling and having hysterics.

When Carter came down he couldn't do anything. Zora May was gone, and the alligator had got her, and there wasn't anything to do. He got his gun and rowed up and down the river, but he did not see anything of the alligator, of course, and he was rowing back to the cabin when Orpheus Cadwallader caught up with him.

Orpheus went back to the cabin with him, and when they got there May was in pretty bad shape. It looked as if she had gone clean crazy. She was sitting on the floor, beating on her breasts, singing some kind of crazy song that Orpheus had never heard before and then breaking into a camp-meeting song for a while, and then going back to the crazy sort of singing. She wouldn't listen to them and she wouldn't talk, and Carter said she was mourning and there was nothing to do about it. But Orpheus walked up to the nearest farm and got the folks to come down and to telephone into town to a doctor, and then he came back and told us about it.

Well, it made the biggest stir that anything in Riverbank had made for a long time, you can bet. The farm folks who went to Carter Calverton's when Orpheus went for them said that there was no doubt that the alligator had got Zora May—nobody could think anything else. Dr. Billings, who was the doctor that went up from town to see what he could do for Carter's wife, said that the tracks had been pretty much walked over by the time he got there, but that

ZORA MAY

he had taken a lantern and examined them, and they were certainly alligator tracks. The next day Jibby's father went over, because he knew a good deal about alligators, and he said they were alligator tracks.

At first our mothers wanted us all to leave our island and go back to town, but after a day or so they got over the scare. They made the little kids play on the porches of the cottages, because the porches were on stilts and safe enough, and the rest of us carried our rifles.

Downtown the excitement was worse than on our island. A good many of the men and boys began alligator hunting again, working in gangs, and Parcell doubled his reward, because he saw he was going to have another summer with nobody swimming in the river, unless that alligator was killed. The City Council, too, offered a reward of two hundred dollars.

But nothing came of it. For three or four weeks no one saw a sign of the alligator except the tracks in one place or another where it had waddled up on a muddy bank or on a sandy shore—its claws making deep marks and its tail making a groove in between. Even Rufe Higgs did not get a sight of the beast, and he was on the river all the time. He swore that if he did get the alligator he would not shoot it, he would cut its heart out alive, because Zora May was his daughter.

But, as I say, nothing came of it. We boys did all the scouting we could in our skiffs, but you can't get around the Mississippi very well in a skiff. We tried to buy a second-hand motor-boat, but there were

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

none for sale that we had enough money to touch, and we got rather ashamed that we had ever called ourselves the Young Alligator Hunters. In that way it came along to the time when we caught the ghost.

I don't know whether you have ever caught a ghost or not, or whether you know how to catch one, but this is how Jibby Jones did it. And when you consider that there are no ghosts, and never were any, and that everything about ghosts is just imagination or fake or plain nonsense, I'll say Jibby did pretty well, everything considered.

It was the fifteenth of July. I remember the day because it was Saturday, and my birthday is the twenty-ninth of July, which was just two weeks later. And what happened was this:

Skippy and Tad and Jibby said, that morning, that they were going around behind the island into the slough to have a look for the alligator. They wanted Wampus Smale and me to go with them, but Wampus was getting sick of hunting alligators and we thought we would row up the river, taking it easy and slow, to a place four or five miles up, in Bertram's Slough where we had heard the bass were biting. So we rowed up there and fished in one place and another, but we had no luck to speak of, and about sundown we started back. And we had not gone more than a quarter of a mile before we ran plump into a mudbar in Bertram's Slough and stuck there good and fast.

Now, it is one thing to be stuck on a sandbar, but it is another thing to be stuck on a mudbar, running into it from upstream. You can get out and wade

ZORA MAY

on almost any sandbar I ever saw, but a mudbar in a slough (when the river has just been falling) is a mean place to be. The mud may be twenty feet deep for all you know, and if you step out into it you may go right on down into it over your head. You don't want to monkey with a mudbar much. The best thing to do is to stay in the boat and work the boat off the best way you can. So that's what we tried. The trouble was that the mud was just thick enough to hold us and thin enough so that an oar pushed right down into it. We had a long, mean job of it, I'll tell you!

The first thing we knew it was plumb dark. The shadows came down and everything looked queer and strange, and then an owl hooted close by us. Wampus looked up.

"Say!" he said. "We're right by the Haunted House! I don't like it."

I stood straight and looked over toward the shore. There, sure enough, was the old house we called the Haunted House, back in among the trees a little, all black and gloomy. And then—as sure as you are a foot high—I saw something tall and white in one of the windows.

"Look!" I said, but Wampus saw it, too. It stood in the window and raised its arms and then it sort of disappeared and we saw it at another window. I thought "ghost!" and Wampus thought the same thing at the same moment, and the only other thing we thought of was to get away from there just as quick as we could. We were scared out of our wits,

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

and that's a fact, and I don't know how it happened, but we were both in the mud and panting and pulling at the boat and hanging on, and the first thing we knew we were climbing back into the boat, mud from head to foot—mud in our hair and in our ears and down our necks—and the boat was drifting on down the slough.

Whenever an owl hooted we almost jumped out of our skins, and when a frog croaked we gasped. We were scared, all right! Mighty scared!

By and by we got out of that dark slough and into the river, and for a while we did not say anything. Then Wampus said:

"That was a ghost, all right!"

"You bet it was," I said. "I saw it. I saw it as plain as day. And I could see right through it. It sort of glowed—a cold wet sort of glow."

You know how folks are—most of them. If they see anything like we saw, they *want* to think it is something terrible. While their minds are all worked up and jiggly, they go on thinking it is worse and worse, and then they'll never back water. I don't know why that is, but it's so. By the time we got down to our island, we were ready to swear on a stack of Bibles as high as the sky that we had seen a real ghost.

Well, Jibby Jones and Tad and Skippy were there, waiting for us, and we told them the whole business, and Tad and Skippy believed in that ghost right from the first minute, and twice as hard as we did. That's another funny thing about folks. If you see something that looks like a ghost, you'll say it *is* a ghost,

ZORA MAY

and the person you tell it to believes it twice as much as you do and adds on a little when he tells about it. If anybody happens to mention ghosts, he'll say, "Well, I know a fellow who actually did see a real ghost, and I can prove it, because his name was Wampus Smale, and he lives at Riverbank, Iowa, this very day!" And that's how all this stuff about ghosts and spirits and things gets started, and how it keeps on. Because nobody likes to say, "Well, you're a fibber, and your Wampus Smale is another." It doesn't sound polite to say that, but maybe it's what a fellow ought to say—anyway, if he thinks it.

All the while we were talking, Jibby Jones did not say a thing. He just let us talk, and listened to what we said. So, just when we were the most excited about it, Wampus happened to notice him.

"What are you looking at me that way for?" Wampus wanted to know. "Don't you believe us?"

"Yes, I do," Jibby said in that slow, drawly way of his. "I do believe you, Wampus. I believe you saw all the ghost anybody ever sees. But I don't believe in ghosts. I don't believe there are any ghosts."

Well, neither did any of us—not really. We had forgotten that; we were so excited about the ghost that we forgot we did not believe there were any such things.

"Well, but—" Wampus began.

"Yes, that's what I say," I said. "If it wasn't a ghost, what was it? We saw it, all right! Of course, I don't believe in ghosts, but I *saw* it—I saw it with my own eyes."

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

Jibby was silent for a long time. He stood looking out at the river, wiggling the tip of that long nose of his with the tips of his fingers, and we didn't know what he *would* say. And what he said was just exactly the opposite from what we expected.

"That's the peculiar part of it," he said. "I saw it, too."

"The ghost?" I asked.

"Well, Wampus says it's a ghost," said Jibby. "I don't believe in ghosts, so I won't say it was one. It was white. I'll say that much—it was white."

"And it was up there in the Haunted House?"

"Yes, that's where it was," Jibby said, as if he hated to admit it.

"Did it look like a ghost?" we asked him.

"I don't believe in ghosts," Jibby said, as if he was choosing his words and did not want to tell any fibs. "If I believed in ghosts I might go as far as to say it looked like a ghost. I might go as far as to say it might have looked like a ghost."

"When did you see it?" Skippy asked.

"Well, I was up there night before last," Jibby said. "I rowed up there. I was rowing down Bertram's Slough night before last."

"What did it look like to you?" Tad Willing asked.

"Well—" Jibby said slowly. "Well, it was white."

Then, all at once, Tad—who is mighty level-headed—spoke right up.

"I don't believe it was a ghost at all," he said. "I think it was some one trying to fool you fellows. I think it was somebody rigged up in a sheet, or some-

thing white, playing ghost to throw a scare into you. I've read a lot of ghost stories—scads of them—and that's how they usually turn out in the end. The ghost is some smart fellow trying to scare folks. I don't believe any of you—Wampus or George or Jibby—saw a real ghost up there. I'll bet you didn't!"

"All right!" said Wampus. "All right! We can mighty easily find out. We can go up there to-morrow night, the whole bunch of us, and sneak up on the place, and find out!"

Right there Jibby sat down on a rock and looked solemn.

"And what if it should be a real ghost?" he asked.

We had not thought of that. Somehow it did not seem as if we wanted to be in such a hurry about it, after all. Sneaking up on the Haunted House in the dark, not knowing what we might run into, did not seem to be what we wanted to do, either, when we came to think of it.

"Then, if you're so smart and all," Wampus said, "what would you do about it?"

"I'd catch the ghost," Jibby said.

"What!" we exclaimed.

"I'd catch the ghost," Jibby said again. "I remember when I was with Father in Madagascar there was a ghost—anyway, the natives thought it was a ghost—that made a lot of trouble. It was the ghost of an old native named Chaggamagga. Somebody killed him in his hut and the natives thought he haunted it. They saw something dark in the hut door every night—the ghost of a Madagascar native would be black,

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

and not white, you know. And the women were afraid of it; they all moved out of the village and said they would never come back. So the natives made a haggajagga——”

“What’s a haggajagga?” Wampus asked.

“It means ‘ghost-trap,’ ” said Jobby. “ ‘Hagga’ means ‘trap,’ and ‘jagga’ means ‘ghost’—‘trap for a ghost’ is what it means. So they made a haggajagga and set it in the hut——”

“How did they make it?” Skippy asked, but just then Jibby’s mother called from their cottage, because supper was ready.

“Well, a good, reliable haggajagga is pretty hard to make,” Jibby said, “but I guess we can make one, and if it is made right it will catch any ghost there ever was—whether it is a real ghost or somebody pretending he is a ghost. To-morrow, if it is a clear day, we’ll start right in to build one.”

“Why can’t we do it if it isn’t a clear day?” Wampus asked.

“The *Urtica dioica* leaves have to be dried in the sun or they are no good for haggajaggas,” Jibby said, and then he had to hurry to his supper. As we walked up to our cottages we talked a little about Jibby and his haggajagga, if that was what he wanted to call his ghost trap.

“Don’t you let him fool you,” Wampus said. “He’s always up to some smart trick. Just because he’s been all over the world, he thinks he can fool us any time he wants to. If you mention warts, he starts

ZORA MAY

right in to tell you how the natives cure warts in Patagonia—”

“All right,” I said; “but if he does tell how the natives cure warts in Patagonia he goes ahead and shows how they do it, don’t he? And if you have a wart he cures it, don’t he?”

“Yes, but—” Wampus said, for he was always “yes-butting.” “Yes, but this ghost-trap business is nonsense. First he says there are no ghosts and then he says he can make a trap that will catch the ghost. How can you catch a ghost if there isn’t any ghost? I’ll bet it’s just a scheme to make us look like a lot of sillies. And I’ll tell you one reason why I say so.”

“Well, what?” Tad asked.

“Well, he said the leaves had to dry in the sun, didn’t he?” Wampus asked. “And what kind of leaves did he say? He said *Urtica dioica* leaves, didn’t he? Why did he? Because they just came into his mind first, because there are more of them around here than any other kind. You wait and see! He’ll tell us to go and pick about fifteen bushels of *Urtica dioica* leaves—and we’ll get stung—”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GHOST

WHEN Wampus put it that way it certainly did look as if Jibby was planning to play some sort of joke on us, because maybe you know what *Urtica dioica* leaves are. They are stinging-nettle leaves. It just happened we knew that or we might have thought *Urtica dioica* was some sort of strange Madagascar tree, but Mrs. Willing knew all kinds of things about botany, and one day when we were going across our island Tad brushed against a stinging-nettle and gave a yelp, and Mrs. Willing said, "What's the matter, Tad? Touch a *Urtica dioica*?" And then she told us that was the Latin name for the stinging-nettle, and Skippy Root said, "It's a good name for it—urtica—because it 'urts when you touch it." So we remembered "urtica." And it did look as if it would be a swell joke for Jibby to send us gathering stinging-nettles.

So after supper we all met on my porch—Tad and Wampus and Skippy and I—and talked it over. First we tried to think what Jibby was trying to fool us for, because whenever he started any of these things he always seemed to have something in mind. If he started out by saying he would show us how the natives of Zanzibar played the tootydugga game it would turn out to be some foolishness that cured

THE GHOST

Wampus of biting his finger-nails, or something like that. But we could not, for the life of us, think of anything like that he might be trying to work up to with this ghost-trap business; so Skippy said:

"I'll tell you what let's do! I'll tell you how we can put the kibosh on *this* trick. We'll all go over to Jibby's right now, and we'll pretend we are mighty interested in the ghost-trap, and we'll begin to talk about it right in front of Mr. Jones himself, because I'll bet old Jibby just invented this whole ghost-trap idea, and that the natives of Madagascar never in all their lives made a single ghost-trap!"

So we did just that. We walked down the path to the Jones's cottage and up on to their porch where Mr. and Mrs. Jones and Jibby were sitting. They had a lamp on the table and Mrs. Jones was sewing. Mr. Jones was writing his book about the Mississippi River at one corner of the table, and Jibby was drawing something on a sheet of paper at another corner, and as we came up Jibby got up from his chair and walked over to his father.

"Hello, fellows!" Jibby said to us; "just a minute"; and then he said to his father: "Father, I don't remember just where the Madagascar natives put the circle of ashes when they made that ghost-trap—was it inside the circle of bones or outside of it?"

Mr. Jones looked at the drawing Jibby was making and studied it a moment or two.

"This is right, the way you have it, son," he said then. "The bone circle is inside the ash circle, and the ash circle is inside the drief-leaf circle."

THE GHOST

"I thought so," Jibby drawled, "and there's just one other thing I'd like to ask you, Father. Do you think these stinging-nettle leaves will do as well as the leaves the Madagascar natives used?"

Mr. Jones is a serious man, and he had to think about this before he answered.

"I think so," he said at last. "I would not like to be too positive, but I think so. The *Urtica dioica* we have here is not the nettle they have in Madagascar; their nettle is the *Urtica heterophylla*, from which the natives make that strong, silky fiber, but I know that in some parts of Germany the natives make a fine silky fiber from the *Urtica dioica*, so they must be about the same in general character. For a ghost-trap I should think one ought to be as good as the other, especially as there are no such things as ghosts."

"But when we were in Tankatuma the natives did catch something in their ghost-trap, Father," Jibby said.

"We do not quite understand all about the 'magic'—if I may call it that—of the uncivilized peoples," Mr. Jones said. "I am absolutely sure they did not catch a 'ghost' in their trap at Tankatuma. What they did," he said, turning to us, "was to make the trap and put it in the hut they thought was 'haunted,' and then they claimed they had caught the 'ghost.' What it was I don't know. It may be they hypnotized us and we only thought we saw the 'ghost.' Or it may be that the white, filmy thing was only a phosphorescent glow

THE GHOST

that arose from the ashes, dry bones, and dry nettle leaves."

"I certainly was frightened," Mrs. Jones said. "For a minute or so I really did think it was a ghost. Until my common sense told me it could not be. It was really amazing, especially when their old priest took the palmleaf and wafted the 'ghost' into that old bottle and threw it into the river."

"It was all very amusing, at any rate," Mr. Jones said, and went back to his writing.

Jibby went into the cottage and brought out another lamp and we boys went to the far end of the porch, so as not to bother Mr. Jones, and Jibby spread out the plan of the ghost-trap and explained it to us. We were mighty interested, you can believe. It did not make any difference to us now whether the ghost up at Bertram's Slough was a real ghost or an imitation one. If we could make a trap and catch it and waft it into a bottle, it would be something worth doing, just for the fun of it, and we were all eager to get at it and to do it if we could.

Jibby explained the whole thing so we understood it as well as he did. The nettle leaves had to be gathered fresh and then dried very quickly in a very hot sun. They had to dry until they were as dry as oak leaves in the autumn—stiff and crispy—and then they had to be kept crispy by keeping them near a heat. The best way, Jibby thought, would be to make a sort of sheet-iron oven and put the nettle leaves in it after they had been sun-dried. He said we could put clean flat stones around the oven, outside, and keep

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

a small fire burning night and day on the stones. The fire would give us the clean wood-ashes we had to have, and we could rig up wires above the fire and hang the bones on the wires, because the bones had to be thoroughly dry, too. Any kind of bones would do, except fish bones, and we thought it would not be much trouble to gather enough on the island. If not, we could go over to the mainland and skirmish around and get plenty.

Of course, this was not all of the ghost-trap. The idea was that you took all this stuff—the bones and the leaves and the ashes—up to the Haunted House, and made a trap of them in the room where you thought the ghost was. It was going to be easy enough to find the room, because there was only one room in the Haunted House. Then, all round the edge of the room you made a circle of dried nettle leaves—a perfect circle—but you filled all the corners of the room with the leaves, too. Then, about a foot inside the leaf circle you made the ash circle, and a foot inside the ash circle you made the bone circle, putting the bones end to end and being sure the bones all touched. If there was an opening between any two bones it broke the “circuit” or something.

That was the main part of the ghost-trap, but you had to have an opening in each circle so that the ghost could get inside. Then you had to have some way of closing each circle after the ghost got inside, and that trapped him. He could not cross the closed circles. The trouble was to think of some way to close those three circles after the ghost entered them. In Mada-

THE GHOST

gascar, Jibby said, the natives used the pith of the sunflower palm. This pith absorbs moisture very quickly and the moisture makes it stretch—as a sponge swells when it gets wet—and by putting sunflower palm pith under the ashes and leaves and bones on each side of the “doors” of the circles, and then having the floor moist, the pith would swell and close the “doors.” A tiny slit—an eighth of an inch—was enough to let the “ghost” enter. And to be sure the ghost would enter, a bait was put in the center of the trap. This had to be made exactly right, of a dozen feathers of an owl, some blood of any sort at all, and seven pure white pebbles. These were all stuck together in any sort of shape, and it was a bait that would draw a “ghost” every time, if there was one in the neighborhood. The Madagascar natives called it “tuggajagga,” which means “ghost-candy,” Jibby said, and no ghost could keep away from it for a minute.

Well, we all began to suggest things that would swell with moisture, to take the place of the pith of the sunflower palm, and we thought of a dozen things, I guess. It did not look as if we were going to have any trouble about that part of it, but Jibby stopped us right there.

“I guess we won’t have any trouble making a Madagascar ghost trap,” he said, “and we’ve got plenty of palmleaf fans, and bottles to waft the ghost into, but there’s another thing we’ve got to do.”

“What?” Skippy asked.

“Well, suppose that ghost isn’t a ghost,” Jibby said. “Suppose it isn’t even the phosphorescent sort of

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

imitation ghost the Madagascar natives bottled and threw into their river. Suppose it is just a man or a boy rigged up in white, playing ghost to be mean, or to hide some secret by scaring us away. We haven't planned a trap to catch that sort of 'ghost,' and we ought to. When I set out to catch a ghost, I want to catch it, no matter what sort of ghost it is. When I go ghost-trapping I want to catch all the ghosts there are."

"How can we do it?" Tad asked.

"We've got to plan a trap for that, too," Jibby said. "I would not want to set a bear-trap for the fellow, even if he is the meanest sort of fellow, because it might mangle his ankle, or even break it, and lame him for life. And it might be a girl, or a lady. We've got to be ready to catch that ghost whether it is a ghost or a near-ghost or a no-ghost."

"Well, I guess there are plenty of kinds of traps," I said. "If we can make a trap to catch a phosphorus ghost, we ought to be able to make one that will catch a man."

"Yes," Jibby agreed, "but we want to be quick about it; we don't want to waste all summer making ghost-traps."

The next day we all got busy in good earnest. You have no idea what a lot of work there is in just getting ready to set a ghost-trap! You go up there on our island some day and see how long it takes you to find enough smooth flat stones to lay all around a sheet-iron oven that is big enough to hold all the dried nettle leaves a ghost-trap needs! And then try to find

THE GHOST

enough sheet-iron to make the oven! And then see how long it takes you to fit that old sheet-iron together into an oven that will hold dried nettle leaves, with a fire outside, and have no cracks the fire will flare through and set the dried leaves afire! We burned three lots of dried nettle leaves before we ever got that oven right.

And bones! Why, say! When you don't want old bones you think there are a million within reach of your hand. But just try to find enough to make a complete bone circle! And a little thing like getting a dozen feathers you are dead sure came out of an owl! You go out and try to shoot an owl just when you want one the worst way! Day is no good—you can walk fifty miles and never see one by day; and at night you hear one hoot and think it is just outside your window, and when you go out to get it it is away off yonder, and the nearer you get to it, as you might say, the farther away it is. And if you ever do come up to where it is, there isn't anything but the hoot; you can't see the owl. And maybe there are some folks who can shoot "by ear," but we were not that sort of shooters.

We worked like beavers, all five of us, and Jibby was the hardest worker of the lot. He kept scolding us and telling us to hurry along and get something done, and we chased all over eastern Iowa and western Illinois, almost, hunting bones, and we gathered regular haystacks of nettle leaves, and piles of dry wood for the fires, and we hunted owl feathers, and searched for white pebbles, and tried eighty-seven kinds of pith

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

and things. And all the while Jibby was bossing the whole job and planning the man-ghost-trap. The minute any of us had half a second to spare, Jibby would set us to work on the man-ghost-trap, and I'll say that man-ghost-trap was a wonder of the world!

Jibby explained that man-ghost-trap to us eighty-seven times, but just when we thought we understood how it was going to work we would sort of miss the idea and he would have to explain all over again, and right in the middle of the explanation he would stop and say:

"Wait! Hold on! I see what it needs! Go and get me a two-by-four slab, three feet and eighth inches long, notched one foot from the end, and with four holes bored in it. And about twelve feet of wire—any kind of wire. And I want a doorknob. A china doorknob, if you can find one. Or any other kind will do."

Then we would all rush off and find what he wanted and bring them to him, and saw boards and bore holes, and Jibby would nail the things to the man-ghost-trap, and wire the doorknob onto it, and then think of forty-seven other things he needed—hinges and pulleys and a cigar-box and I don't know what all. And right in the middle of it he would have to rush off because the fire around the nettle leaf oven needed wood, or the nettle leaves were afire again.

Well, a week went by and it seemed like a minute. This man-ghost-trap of Jibby's was growing all the time. I don't know what it did look like. It looked as if a crazy man had tried to invent all the kinds of

2

2

f

THE GHOST

machinery the world ever had, and then tried to put them all in one machine. He kept us at it so long that I got suspicious.

"Listen here, Tad," I said to Tad Willing; "I think there is something phony about this. I don't believe Jibby is making a ghost-trap at all; I believe he is making an alligator-trap. Don't you remember that away back last year he began thinking how to catch the alligator? Well, I'll bet that's what this is—an alligator-trap."

We dared Jibby to say this wasn't so, and he came right out and said it was not so.

"No, George," he drawled, "this is not an alligator-trap. The alligator does not bother me now. I know how to catch the alligator."

"You do!" we exclaimed. "Well, then, why in the world are we wasting all this time making a crazy trap to catch a ghost? Why don't we go and get the alligator?"

"Because I can't catch the alligator until I catch the ghost," Jibby said as solemn as an owl.

And that was all he would say! We tried to get him to tell us what he meant, but he would not say another word. So all we could do was to plug away at making that ghost-trap.

About noon of the next Wednesday, Jibby stopped short as he was nailing a slab on one part of the man-ghost-trap—it was about the last thing he had to do to it—and his mouth fell open and he looked at us as if the very worst had happened.

"Say!" he exclaimed.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"Well, what?" we asked him.

"Dumb!" he cried. "I'm a stupid! This trap can't possibly get through the door of that Haunted House! This trap is three times too big to get through any door. We've got to take it apart, and make a plan of it, and number every piece of the trap, and mark the number on the plan, and then put the trap together again *inside* that haunted house! Come on, now! Hustle!"

That was Wednesday, along about noon, and—what with keeping our fire going and taking down one dry bone and putting up a damp one to dry out, and drawing the plan of the man-ghost-trap—it was night before we ever got at taking the trap apart. All day Thursday and Friday we worked on that trap, taking it apart, marking the pieces, and marking the chart, and carrying the pieces down to our skiffs and putting them aboard.

Early Saturday morning we were all up. That was my birthday, but I didn't expect any presents until evening, because my father would not be up from town until then and I was to have a sort of party, with a cake and all, in the evening, and we planned to get up to the Haunted House and rig up our traps and get back as soon as we could. We were going up late that night—if we dared—to see whether we had caught anything.

Our skiffs had such heavy loads, with us five fellows and all the ghost-trap stuff, that we could not make much speed upstream and we had plenty of time

THE GHOST

to talk. We talked ghost and ghost-trap, and then Jibby or somebody said:

"George, what do you want for a birthday present?"

I wouldn't say. I knew what I wanted most of anything in the world, but I was ashamed to say it, because I knew I would not get it. I said I didn't care what I got; I'd like whatever I did get, if I got anything. And presently we came to Bertram's Slough.

We rowed in below the mudbar, where the water was deeper, and tied our skiffs and climbed over the ghost-trap junk and got ashore.

"Now, then, you fellows," Jibby said, "get busy and unload this stuff. Here, George, you grab this bag of bones and hustle it up to the house, and scoot right back for another load."

I took the bag of dried bones and slung it over my shoulder and dragged myself up the mudbank and pushed through the weeds until I came to the Haunted House. It looked common enough by daylight, and the door was slightly ajar, and I pushed it open with my foot and went in. Then I stopped short!

A big sheet of cardboard was stuck on a stick where I almost butted my face into it, and it said, in big black letters, "Happy birthday to George, from his father and mother," and there, filling a good part of the room, was the niftiest motor-boat you ever saw in your life! A part of the side of the cottage had been battled away to let the motor-boat in, and the floor was covered with shavings and pails that had had paint in them, and while I stood there old Orpheus

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

Cadwallader got up from behind the motor-boat and grinned at me.

"Your father bought it in Derlingport, George," he said, "and she's as fine a boat as there is on the Mississippi now, since I fixed her up. We gave her a new name."

I let out one yell of joy, and then I saw the name on her bow—it was "Ghost." Because she was all white. And then I knew what old Jibby had been up to the whole two weeks—he had been keeping us so busy we wouldn't have time to come up and poke around the Haunted House: he had used the "ghost" we had seen to keep us from coming. For here stood old Orph Cadwallader in white overalls and he was the "ghost." And we had to be kept away while he finished overhauling and painting the—no, *my* motor-boat.

I gave another yell and chased back to the slough as hard as I could tilt, and there was Jibby and there were the other fellows. They were throwing pieces of ghost-trap and bags of dried nettle leaves and boxes of ashes into the slough, and Tad and Wampus and Skippy just grinned and looked sort of foolish. Jibby looked up and grinned and did not look foolish.

"Well, George," he drawled, "did you catch the ghost?"

"Yippy-yippy-yip!" I shouted, and old Jibby turned to Wampus.

"That's Madagascarese," he said, as solemn as an owl. "It means, 'Yes, I certainly did.'"

And then we all laughed.

CHAPTER XXIV

ORPHEUS SETS A TRAP

WHEN we had the *Ghost* in the river and had tried her out, we knew what old Jibby had meant when he said his man-ghost-trap had to be finished before he began alligator hunting again. The *Ghost* had just about twice as much speed as Wampus Smale's boat had ever had, and we could get from one part of the river to another in no time at all. The first thing we did Monday was to run down to Riverbank to get a good supply of gasoline, and to ask Parcell if anything new had been heard of the alligator.

Well, there was no doubt the alligator was still hanging around in the river. Half a dozen farmers and shanty-boat people had reported more chickens and pigs stolen and a dozen or twenty had seen places where the alligator had waddled up on shore, leaving his tracks. Parcell was mighty sore at the alligator—the season was almost gone and no one had used his beach at all, and the women were afraid to go on the river. It had almost ruined his boat-renting business. We told him we were going to put in all the rest of our time, until school began, hunting the alligator, but it did not seem to cheer him up much.

"Yeh!" he said, sort of careless. "A lot of 'em are doing that, and a lot of good it does me!"

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"Come on," I said to Jibby, but low, so Parcell could not hear. "Let's go. He's grouchy."

But Jibby wasn't ready to go.

"I think, Mr. Parcell," Jibby said, "we are going to get the alligator. I think the reason no one has got it yet is because they haven't given it enough thought. I've been thinking about the alligator quite steadily, and I think we'll get it."

Parcell looked at Jibby for over a minute, and then he laughed.

"You look as if you'd get it!" he said.

"That's probably because I look like my Grandfather Parmenter," Jibby said. "My Grandfather Parmenter usually got what he wanted."

That was all we got out of Parcell, and we went up to the "Eagle" office, and Jibby talked with the editor. When he explained what he wanted, the editor said he guessed it would be all right—it would amuse folks, anyway. He said the readers of the "Eagle" had enjoyed what had been printed about The Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley last year, and they might like some more of it. He said he would do what Jibby wanted.

What Jibby wanted was to have the "Eagle" radio broadcasting station send out news of the alligator every evening, just as it did the weather reports. We boys had two or three radio sets up there on our island, but as a usual thing we did not have any one come up from town except once a week or so, and what Jibby wanted was fresh news of the alligator.

ORPHEUS SETS A TRAP

So the editor said he would broadcast alligator news every evening.

On the way back to Birch Island, Jibby told us one of the things he wanted the Young Alligator Hunters to do. We were to keep as close on the track of that alligator as we could. If it was seen in a certain place, we were to go there in the *Ghost* early the next morning, and if a chicken or a pig was stolen by the alligator, we were to go to the place it was stolen from as quick as we could, and if the alligator's tracks were seen in the mud anywhere, or on the sand, we were to speed there in the *Ghost* just as soon after the tracks were discovered as possible.

The only change we made in the Young Alligator Hunters was that I was elected Admiral and Wampus was elected the Head Hunter. This was because I had a motor-boat now, and Wampus did not have one. We reelected Tad as Chief cout and Skippy as Historian, Secretary, Treasurer, and Assistant Admiral, and Jibby said he was satisfied to be Chief Zoöogist and Encylopædist just the same as ever.

We got back to the island about three o'clock that afternoon, and the first news we had was that the alligator had been on the island! Everybody was excited and talking, and Orph Cadwallader was having the time of his life because every one was crowded around him asking him questions. It was quite a while before we could get the straight of his story. What had happened was this:

While Orpheus was spending so much time up the river painting the *Ghost* he had to leave his pigs and

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

chickens unprotected, and he had been afraid the alligator might try to make a raid on them, so he had set a steel trap back of his shack, just about where he thought the alligator might try to nose under the chicken-wire fence. And last night, sure enough, the alligator had tried to get one of his pigs or a chicken.

Orph hadn't discovered it until along in the afternoon. He had been busy mending Mrs. Willing's pump all morning, and about noon he went from house to house to collect the garbage, because that was what he fed to his pigs, and when he went to dump it into the pig-pen he saw the trap was snapped. So he traced back to the edge of the slough and there he saw the alligator's trail and claw marks. In one or two places he saw what he was pretty sure was blood, but he couldn't be quite sure of it.

We went back around behind Orph's chicken-wire fence and had a look at the tracks and the trap.

"Orpheus," Jibby asked him, "did the alligator get a pig or a chicken this time?"

"No, sir! No, siree!" Orpheus said. "That alligator did not wait for anything like that when the trap nipped him. Why?"

"Because," Jibby said, "I thought perhaps it was not the alligator that the trap snapped; it might have been a pig. If the alligator was carrying off a chicken and the trap snapped on the chicken, there would have been feathers around, but if it snapped on a pig there wouldn't be any more feathers than if it snapped on the alligator. If the trap snapped on a pig the alligator was carrying away, it would not bother the

ORPHEUS SETS A TRAP

alligator much, but if it snapped on the alligator, I'm afraid the alligator may leave this part of the river. I don't believe an alligator likes to have traps snapped on it."

"I guess not," Orpheus said.

So Jibby turned away and walked back to the river side of our island. He stood quite a while looking out at the river, thinking so hard the end of his nose sort of quivered.

"Look here, Jibby!" I said. "I don't know what you are thinking about, but this don't seem to me to be any time to be standing here thinking. We know where that alligator is—it is in that slough back of this very island. We ought to scoot around there in the *Ghost* and try to find it."

"Yes," Jibby said, as if it did not interest him much. "But I was thinking of something else. I was thinking we ought to get Rufus Higgs to join with us in hunting the alligator. I know a great deal about alligators, because I've been studying them in books for over a year now, but Rufus Higgs came from where the alligators live. I think if we had my brains and Rufus Higgs's experience we might get that alligator."

We talked that over a little and we told Jibby it would be all right to get Rufe Higgs to help us, but that just now we ought to try searching the slough, so we got into the *Ghost* and gave the slough a good combing, but we did not see anything of the alligator.

The next morning, which was Tuesday, we went to find Rufe Higgs. We ran down to town first, to

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

report about the trap to the editor of the "Eagle" so he could broadcast the latest news that evening, and when we got back to Parcell's dock we ran plump into Rufe Hicks. I told him, right there, that we wanted him to join with us to hunt the alligator.

He wouldn't do it. I told you he was a cross-grained sort of fellow, and he snapped us up pretty short and told us to our faces that boys like us were no good at hunting alligators and that he was going to do his own hunting in his own way.

"You folks jus' want to use me," he said. "This here Parcell has offered a reward and the city has offered a reward, and I is the onliest one what knows about alligators. All you wants is to get me all fastened up with you folks so when I gits that reward you gits part of it. No, sir! I ain't got time for no such foolishness! I'm goin' to catch that alligator and I'm goin' to carve its heart out! I ain't got no time for the way you white folks is goin' to treat that alligator."

He went on then to tell us about how he hated alligators, and he told us again about how his folks had lived in a cabin built on stakes that stood in the water, and how his father had had a big family of children and how—every now and then—one of them would fall into the river and an alligator would get it.

He went on and said that that sort of thing was happening all the time, but that he had had one sister—her name was Clarissa—of whom Rufe was especially fond, and one day she fell off the porch of the

ORPHEUS SETS A TRAP

cabin and "snap!" an alligator got Clarissa, and Rufus was so mad he swore he would do nothing but hunt and kill alligators all the rest of his life. And he would have, too, only he had come up the river and there had been none to kill until this one showed up. And now this one had got his daughter Zora May. He said it was partly because that wife he had had, who was now Carter Calverton's wife, was a worthless woman and careless, but it was mostly the alligator's fault. And, anyway, he wasn't going to divide his reward and his revenge with anybody.

So all there was left for us to do was to go back up-river to our island and hunt alligator in our own way.

CHAPTER XXV

WE FIND TRACKS

ON the way back to the island Wampus said he did not blame Rufus Higgs much for feeling the way he did, and I don't know that I blamed him much either. The next few days we scouted around in the *Ghost* and kept a sharp lookout for traces of the alligator. We went up to every log that looked like one, and we stopped and examined every place that looked as if an alligator had been on shore, but for quite a while we found no more places where the alligator had left tracks; and then we did!

It was on the Illinois side of the river, about three miles above our island, just where a small creek empties into the river, and where the shore slants and is muddy. Just beyond the mud is a small pen where a farmer keeps his pigs, and in the mud were the claw-marks of the alligator and its belly channel mark, and the scratch made by the sharp edge of its tail, all as plain as day. The marks were new and sharp, too, and we could tell that, because the mud was soft and the sharp edges of the marks had not begun to round off yet. But there was something else, too. Alongside of the alligator marks were human footmarks—the footprints of a barefoot man. We were standing there, looking at the alligator tracks, when Rufus Higgs came pushing through the willows behind us.

WE FIND TRACKS

He was barefoot and the footprints he made in the mud were exactly like the other footprints. He came up to us and scowled.

"You kids get away from here!" he ordered. "I don't want no truck or dealin's with you! That 'gator has been here not two hours since, and I'm goin' to git him. I don't want none of your inter-ferin'; I'm goin' to kill this reptile myself. I been hidin' in them willows two hours, waitin' for that 'gator to come back, and now you-all done come shushin in with that motor-boat, makin' all kinds of noises, and you scare him away for good and all."

"How did you come to see him, Rufus?" I asked.

"Rowin' past," he said. "Rowin' and lookin', and I seen him. Little more and maybe he would come back, but not now. And likely I ain't goin' to get a whack at him again, 'cause of your interference, blame you!—for this is sure the funderest up the river I've seen him, and the chances is he's goin' to work on up-river from now on and get away from me."

Jibby Jones was standing, looking at the tracks in the mud. He looked funny enough, with his pants rolled up above his knees, and his feet in the mud up to his ankles, and from the waist up as neat and tony as if he was going to a party, with a striped shirt and a white collar and his shell-rimmed spectacles. Now he looked up at Rufe Higgs in his solemn way.

"It seems to be a very large alligator, Mr. Higgs," he said.

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

"It sure is," Rufe Higgs said. "He a huge big 'gator."

"And fat," said Jibby. "It must be one of the fattest alligators in the world. It must be fatter than any alligator I ever saw."

"What you know about alligators, boy?" Rufe Higgs asked, interested all of a sudden.

"Not much," Jibby said modestly. "I haven't seen many—not nearly as many as you have. I've only seen a few hundreds of them, or perhaps a few thousands. When I was with my father on the Southern bayous. You see, my father writes books about rivers."

But Rufe Higgs did not seem to be much interested in what sort of books Jibby's father wrote.

"Boy," he asked, glaring at Jibby, "what make you think this is such a mighty fat 'gator?"

"I think it must have been a big one," Jibby said, "to make such a big belly track. If you had not seen the alligator, and if you did not know alligators so well, I would say this was more like a crocodile track."

"What you mean—crocodile track? Why for you say crocodile track?" Rufus Higgs wanted to know, looking at the marks in the mud.

"Well, you see," Jibby drawled in that slow way of his, "the belly track is so deep and wide, and the claw-marks are so webby. A crocodile's feet are more webbed than an alligator's feet. They are more like these," Jibby said, pointing to the claw-marks in the mud. "This is far more like the tracks of the crocodiles I saw in the Nile."

WE FIND TRACKS

For a second Rufe Higgs looked at Jibby.

"I ain't said it is and I ain't said it ain't, is I?" he asked. "How I know is it a crocodile or is it a 'gator? All I knows is that circus man he says 'gator, didn't he? What do I care is it a 'gator or is it a crocodile?"

"Only this," Jibby drawled. "If it is a crocodile it isn't the saurian that escaped from the circus. And it didn't swim up the Mississippi because crocodiles don't live in the Mississippi. The only crocodile native to the United States is the Florida crocodile, and I don't believe a Florida crocodile would swim halfway across the Gulf of Mexico and all the way up the Mississippi River. But if it is an Egyptian crocodile, or an Asiatic crocodile, everybody will have to be much more careful, because crocodiles are far more ferocious and blood-thirsty than alligators are. And this must be a crocodile, because Professor Hornaday, who knows a lot about them, says there is not one authenticated case of an alligator killing a human being."

"Huh? Not even little chilluns?" demanded Rufe. "What kind of talk is that? Where you learn all that?"

"In a book," Jibby said. "But, of course, if alligators ate your little brothers and sisters, you know better than a book does."

"'Gators sure did," Rufe declared. "And ever since that old big 'gator eat up my sister Clarinda——"

"I thought her name was Clarissa," Jibby said.

"Yes; Clarinda Clarissa Clara was her full entire

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

name," Rufe said. "Sometimes we done call her one name and sometimes we done call her another name. She ain't mind which we calls her. 'Course, when she grew up and got married——"

"Married?" Jibby asked. "But I thought the alligator ate her when she was a baby."

"Sure! Sure!" Rufus said in a hurry. "Seems like I git them sisters of mine all mixed up. It ain't Clarissa Clarinda Clara what grows up and gits married; it's Clara Clarinda Clarissa. You see, my pa and ma they has so many chillun they sort of run out of names. Livin' out on that way-back bayou it ain't handy to get names, and they ain't got very many no-how. So three of them sisters of mine is named Clarissa Clarinda Clara and Clarinda Clara Clarissa and Clara Clarinda Clarissa. Yes, sir!"

Well, I thought that was a foolish way to name folks, but I didn't say anything. It was none of my business. But Wampus did. Wampus is always ready and willing to find something wrong. He said:

"Yes, but you just said it was Clarinda Clarissa Clara that the alligator ate, and that would be another one——"

But Rufe Higgs did not say anything. He looked sort of far-eyed and uneasy and said something about he thought he had better be going along, if he wanted to catch that crocodile, and he went tramping back through the willows and that's all we saw of him that day.

Jibby Jones wiped his spectacles on the end of his

WE FIND TRACKS

black bow-tie and then bent down and looked at the alligator tracks again.

"Well, what do you think?" I asked. "Was it a crocodile or was it an alligator?"

"George," Jibby said in his solemn way, "when my father took me to Egypt I was too young to pay much attention to crocodile tracks."

"Well, anyway," I said, "I don't see that it makes much difference. If it was a crocodile that got away from the circus, it was a crocodile; and if it was an alligator, it was an alligator. What difference does it make? Come along! Don't stand there like a bump on a log studying those marks in the mud."

"Now, George," Jibby said, "don't be impatient. In this world a person should study things while he has a chance, my father says. And I may never have another chance to study crocodile tracks. Before I'm grown up and can go to the Nile again, all the crocodiles may be dead. Why, in Florida alone, it is estimated, three million alligators were killed from 1880 to 1890. And a person can't be too careful. Some day I may want to become a tortoise catcher and lay in wait beside a tortoise run to catch tortoises when they come out of the water, and I'd be foolish if I saw a crocodile track and did not know it from a tortoise track and sat there all day waiting for the tortoise, and then a big crocodile came out of the water and bit my leg off in a minute!"

Well, that was like Jibby Jones, and we did not think anything about it, because it was just the sort of thing he was always doing. He seemed to think nobody

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

could learn too much of a thing. He was always saying: "My father says it is all well enough to learn a little about everything, but it is more valuable to learn a lot about the things you know a little about."

So we stood around there with our feet in the mud while Jibby Jones did his thinking. Now and then he would shake his head and slap at his nose as if a mosquito was on it, and then we knew his thinking wasn't leading him in the direction he wanted it to, and he would begin again. At last he sighed and said we might as well go home.

CHAPTER XXVI

WE GET THE ALLIGATOR

THE next day, which was Wednesday, we decided to make an early start in the *Ghost*, but when we were ready, Jibby Jones said he was not going with us.

"I think, George," he said to me, "I will try to be alone and do some thinking, but if you wish you may take my skiff behind the *Ghost* and tow me up to where we saw the alligator tracks yesterday. I would like to study them a little more. I think I have just about thought out how to capture the alligator, but I want to think of one or two things before I say I am sure."

Well, we were going up where we had seen the tracks, anyway, so we hitched Jibby's skiff on behind, and when we reached the place at the mouth of the little creek we left him there. First we scouted up and down near there, keeping a keen lookout for the alligator, and then we got farther away. The last we saw was Jibby, standing in the mud and looking at those same old tracks.

We had our lunch along and we did not get back until about six, and Jibby was already home. Just after we had the *Ghost* moored safely, Parcell's motor-boat came up to our dock, and my father and Dr. Billings were in the boat. Dr. Billings had come up to stay three or four days, and he had a suitcase with him. We had dinner, and after dinner we had a

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

sort of reception on our side porch, inside the screen because the mosquitoes were so bad, and all the married folks of our crowd and we boys, too, were there.

"I suppose you haven't seen anything more of the alligator up here?" Dr. Billings asked.

My father said we were all interested in it, even if we had not seen it, and that the Young Alligator Hunters were on its trail every day.

"I suppose you know that it almost bit Rufus Higgs's heel off," Dr. Billings said.

"Why, no," my father said. "Is that so?"

"It certainly is," Dr. Billings said. "Higgs came to me to have his foot treated and dressed. A mighty severe bite he got, too, but I treated it with antiseptics, and, although he'll have a sore heel for a while, I think he is safe from blood-poisoning. He was out hunting for the beast and went up a slough somewhere up here, and like the lazy loafer he is, he went to sleep in his skiff and let his foot hang over in the water. And, all at once, he felt this awful bite on his heel. It was luck that in leaping up he swayed the skiff so that it hit the alligator on the top of the head, and that surprised it or stunned it, and it let go. Another second or two and he would have had no heel."

"Did you say it bit him on the heel?" Jibby asked.

"On the heel," Dr. Billings said. "Very bad teeth marks the creature left, too. Not deep, but quite severe."

"Like the marks a steel trap might make," Jibby said.

"Yes, like——" Dr. Billings said; and then he looked

WE GET THE ALLIGATOR

at Jibby. "What do you mean, young man?" he asked.

"I am interested," Jibby said, "because I am the Zoölogist of The Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley, and I'm studying alligators."

"I see!" the Doctor laughed. "And you've been thinking about them quite a little, no doubt."

"Yes, sir," Jibby said. "Especially since this spring."

"And why since this spring?" Dr. Billings asked.

"Because," Jibby said, "I have read a great deal about alligators, and it seemed to me that while an alligator might be in the river here if it escaped from a circus, an alligator would not be apt to stay in the river here all winter. I think it would either go South, or it would be a dead alligator before the winter was over."

"Why, of course!" Jibby's father said. "Any one ought to know that! What in the world have we been thinking of?"

"So I wondered," Jibby said, "if the alligator bit Rufus Higgs the same night that Orpheus Cadwallader's steel trap pinched the alligator?"

And it was the same night! Dr. Billings figured it out, and it was the same night, exactly!

"And you think it was the steel trap and not an alligator that bit Rufe Higgs's heel, do you?" Dr. Billings asked Jibby.

"Yes, sir," Jibby said. "Especially since I have studied the tracks of the alligator in the mud. I no-

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

ticed that Rufus Higgs had a bandage on his heel, but I thought the tracks of the alligator were even more peculiar."

"Why so?" Dr. Billings asked.

"Because, sir," Jibby said, "they showed that the alligator had come out of the river on to the mud, but they did not show that it had wallowed back into the river again. And that was queer, because the alligator was not there. If it had come out of the river and had not gone back, it should have been there. But I thought it might be some special sort of alligator."

"Why? What special sort?" Dr. Billings asked.

"I didn't know just what sort," Jibby said, "but some sort with dried paws. The marks the alligator made with its paws were the kind of marks a dried alligator would make. When a live alligator makes a mark in the mud, its claws are alive and they spread apart the way my toes do when I push them into the mud, but this alligator's claws were stiff—they made scratches like a fork."

We were all sitting up and taking notice now, and Dr. Billings edged forward in his chair and stared at Jibby.

"But, great Scott, son!" he exclaimed. "This means you do not believe there is any alligator in the river. This means you think some one——"

"Yes, sir," Jibby said.

"It means you think some one has been fooling the people, and——"

"Yes, sir—stealing chickens and pigs," Jibby said.

WE GET THE ALLIGATOR

"And babies. Or one baby, anyway. Zora May, I mean. Because Zora May is Rufus Higgs's daughter, after all, and the law wouldn't give her to him."

"But this is astounding!" Dr. Billings declared. "Do you mean to tell me that you believe this Rufus Higgs has made himself an imitation alligator claw——"

"No, sir," said Jibby, "I think he stole the old stuffed alligator from Moses Shuder's junk shed and is using its claws."

Well, nobody seemed much surprised except Dr. Billings, because we had all got used to having Jibby Jones think of things no one else thought of, and—when you came to think it over—Jibby couldn't be anything but right about it. That alligator couldn't have stayed over winter in our part of the river, so there couldn't be any alligator. And Rufe Higgs was just the sort of fellow to be stealing chickens and pigs. And, when he had a chance, he would likely steal his own daughter, too.

The next morning I took my father down to town in the *Ghost*, and he had a good hard time getting anybody to go up to Rufe Higgs's place to find out whether Jibby was right or wrong. It wasn't because people were so afraid of Rufe Higgs and his father, Zeb Higgs, or of Rufe's wife Zora, but because nobody was just sure whose business it was. Zora May had been stolen on the Iowa side of the river, but it was away above town, so the marshal and the police had nothing to do with it, and even if Zora May had been stolen from the Iowa side, raid on Rufe's place

JIBBY JONES AND THE ALLIGATOR

had to be made on the Illinois side of the river, so the Sheriff of our county had nothing to do with it. Our Sheriff had to get a warrant and then get the Sheriff of the Illinois county to get busy. It wasn't until the next day that they got this all fixed up, and then about twenty of the men went up-river in Parcell's motor-boat, all armed with guns, and made the raid on Rufe Higgs's place.

The first thing they saw, when they made old Zeb and Zora hold up their hands, was little Zora May, and just about the next thing they found was the hide and stuffing of the old Moses Shuder alligator.

So The Young Alligator Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley had caught something, after all. At first Parcell refused to pay the reward to us, because he said we had not killed or captured an alligator, but people made such a fuss about it that he was afraid nobody would ever go to his bathing-beach, and he paid us, anyway, and that was fair enough, because Rufe Higgs was worse than any alligator. The City Council paid over its reward the very minute it could.

So everything ended all right. They had a trial for Rufe Higgs over in Illinois, to see whether he should go to jail for stealing pigs and chickens, and on our side of the river they were getting ready to have another for stealing Zora May, but I guess Rufe got tired of being in the skimpy little jail over in Illinois, because one night he dug out of it and disappeared.

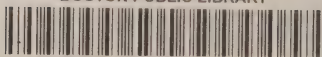
When Moses Shuder got back the stuffed alligator, he made a present of it to The Young Alligator

WE GET THE ALLIGATOR

Hunters of the Upper Mississippi Valley, and it is still hanging in our Club-house, which is the shack alongside Mosquito Hollow, up there on our island. It looks rather played out, with the stuffing coming out of it and one paw gone, but we're mighty proud of it. We call it "Jibby."

THE END

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 09869 541 2

JIBBY JONES

By Ellis Parker Butler

HERE is another of Ellis Parker Butler's inimitable stories of boy life on the Mississippi. Tab and Skippy and George and Wampus are the Gang, but it is Jibby Jones's long nose (like the jib on a sailboat) that scents all the adventures, and Jibby that calmly leads the Gang through their exciting exploits, and there seems to be more room for adventure on the broad banks of the Mississippi than anywhere else in the world.

"Jibby Jones" is a worthy successor to "Swatty," Mr. Butler's first boy story, now an American classic. This new story of real boys and their happy-go-lucky life on the muddy Mississippi, is written with something of the same humor, vigor, and reality that have made "Tom Sawyer" and "Huckleberry Finn" the most universally read boys' stories. Mr. Butler knows boys and he knows his background, and in "Jibby Jones" he has written a book that will delight every real boy, and every man who has been a real boy.

BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

COMRADES OF THE ROLLING OCEAN

Ralph D. Paine

The thrilling adventures of three young Americans, first in a derelict steamer in the North Sea, then in a Chinese junk. *Frontispiece.*

THE DANGER TRAIL

James Willard Schultz

Another Tom Fox story, telling of the adventures of Tom and Pitamakan in country claimed by the Hudson's Bay Company.

A BOOK OF ESCAPES AND HURRIED JOURNEYS

John Buchan

Thrilling journeys from the pages of history, introducing fresh material and told with Buchan's customary vividness.

DAVID IVES: A Story of St. Timothy's

Arthur Stanwood Pier

"Arthur Stanwood Pier's boys' boarding-school stories are always good," wrote Lewis Perry, Headmaster of the Phillips Exeter Academy. *Illustrated.*

THE TRAIL OF THE SPANISH HORSE

James Willard Schultz

These adventures of Tom Fox and Pitamakan on their search for a lost horse make one of the best stories which the author has yet written. *Illustrated.*

THE MYSTERY OF THE RAMAPO PASS

Everett T. Tomlinson

This new story of the American Revolution by Mr. Tomlinson is thrillingly interesting and historically accurate. *Frontispiece.*

TOLD UNDER A WHITE OAK TREE, by Bill Hart's Pinto Pony

The intrepid pinto pony which has borne Bill Hart through many of his most brilliant film successes now tells the story of its dangerous and exciting life in the movies. *Illustrated by James Montgomery Flagg.*

BATTLES AND ENCHANTMENTS

Norreys Jephson O'Connor

Myths and legends of Ireland retold from the ancient Gaelic.

THE WAY OF POETRY

John Drinkwater

This anthology, arranged primarily for young readers by the author of "Abraham Lincoln," etc., is an introduction to the brightest names in English poetry.

GOOD STORIES FOR GREAT BIRTHDAYS

Frances Jenkins Olcott

A worthy successor to the very popular "Good Stories for Great Holidays." *Illustrated.*

JUDY OF YORK HILL

Ethel Hume Bennett

York Hill is the loved boarding-school where Judy and her friends spend several of the most important and amusing years of their lives. *Illustrated.*

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

Ethel Calvert Phillips

A charming story that gives a beautiful and childlike picture of the first Christmas.